

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME:
PLACE ATTACHMENT AMONG THE ELDERLY IN GREENSBURG, KANSAS

by

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Abstract

In a matter of minutes, a small, western Kansas community by the name of Greensburg was over 95% destroyed by a tornado. After the storm, the community's civic leaders decided to rebuild *Green*. As a result, the modified cultural landscape no longer resembled the once familiar town that was viewed as a place of attachment by its predominantly elderly population. The purpose of this thesis is to better understand how the May 4th, 2007, tornado affected the elderly's emotional connection to Greensburg. To identify how the town's landscape changed I used before and after photographs. In order to more fully comprehend how their attachment to the community has changed, interviews were conducted with several elderly residents who rebuilt in Greensburg, as well as those who moved away. The results suggest that the elderly experienced a significant change in their bond to the town. Typically the elderly did not embrace going *Green* and focused more on retaining their memories of how the town used to be. Most significant to their development and change in place attachment were the relationships they developed and maintained with fellow community members. Overall, it was the people that made Greensburg home and a place of attachment. When many of them left for good after the tornado, the elderly's place attachment to Greensburg was forever changed.

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My journey to tell the story of Greensburg's long-time residents and to become a better writer did not come easily. I was only able to endure it with God's help and the moral support of my family and close friends. My loving wife, Stacia, always stood behind me and supported me throughout. No words exist that can convey what her love and support mean to me. I also want to thank my parents and family for their continued support of my education. It brings me great joy to now share my thesis with you.

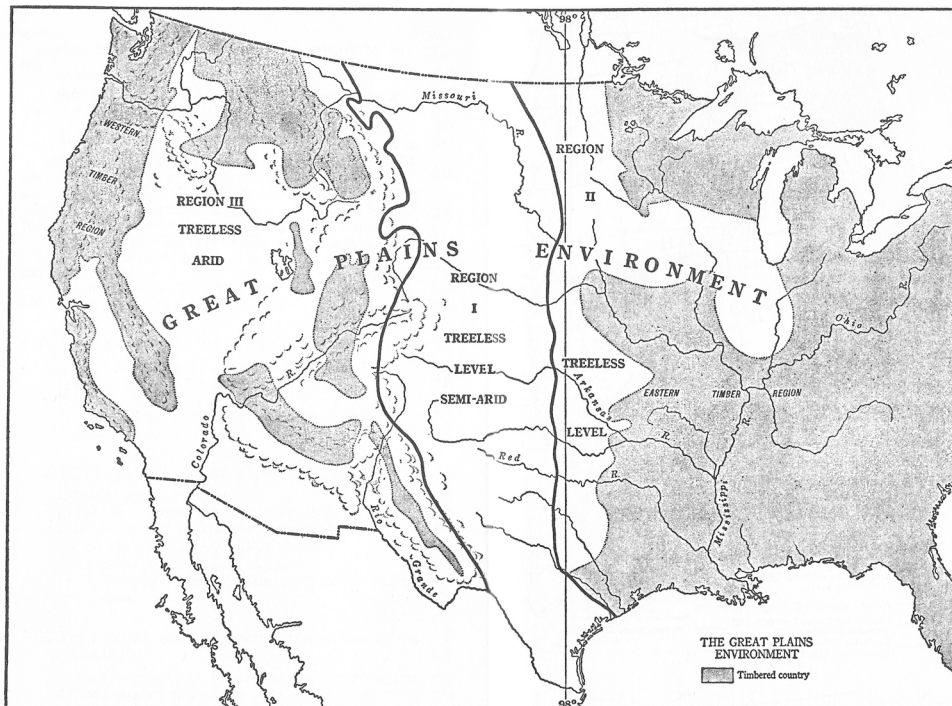
Dedication

*To those whose hometown
holds a special place in their
heart*

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

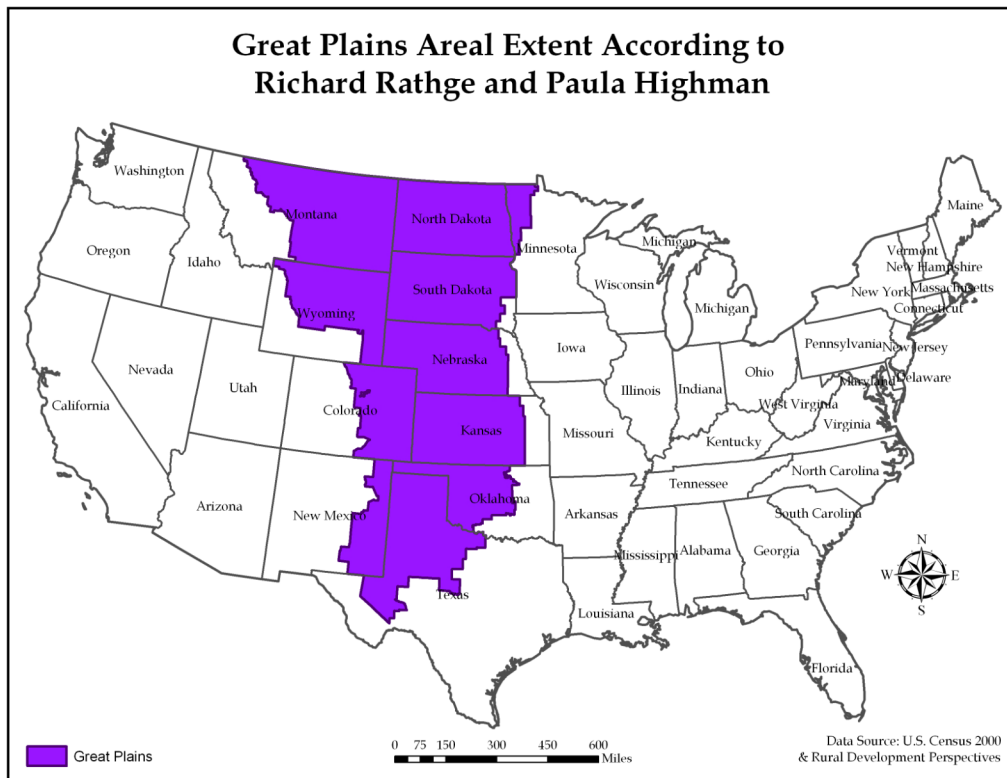
Will the Great Plains of the future resemble a vast, unsettled prairie with an occasional city peppering the landscape? This may become reality if the current population trends continue. Before depopulation became a defining characteristic of the Great Plains, the region was commonly identified by its physical and climatic attributes. The renowned historian, Walter Prescott Webb, identifies the Great Plains, labeled as *Region I* in Figure 1.1, as a region that exhibits a level surface, relatively few trees, and a semi-arid climate [Webb 1981]. Today, however, the Great Plains has frequently been characterized as a region that perpetually exhibits a declining population [Rathge and Highman 1998].

Figure 1.1 Walter Prescott Webb's Great Plains Map



For instance, sociologists Richard Rathge and Paula Highman [1998] identify the counties of the United States that have lagged behind in population growth for the past 50 years. This criterion, based on the USDA's delineation of the Great Plains, creates a demarcation of an 11-State area, resembling Webb's Great Plains. It extends from eastern Montana and North Dakota in the north to eastern New Mexico and northern Texas in the south (Figure 1.2). Regardless of how one defines the Great Plains, a distinct region currently exists in the Midwest where urban dwellers as well as rural residents call home.

Figure 1.2 Great Plains Demarcation Based on Population Change. Map by author.



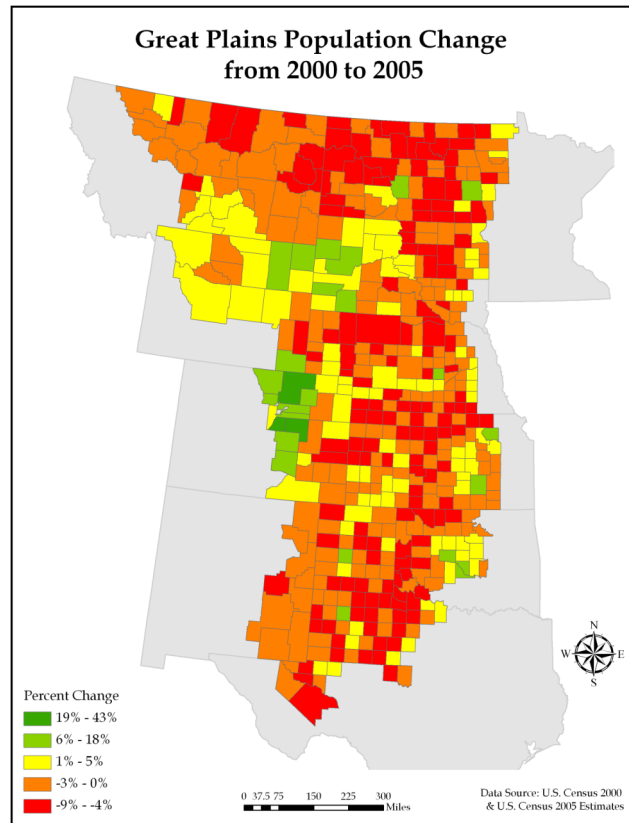
Rural Depopulation

We have learned from Peter Froelich [2001] that population change differs in Great Plains urban centers from its rural counterparts. In urban centers, out-migration offsets in-migration, which leaves population change to be based solely on natural increase [Froelich 2001]. As a whole, more urbanites are in their childbearing, which results in an overall population gain in Great Plains urban centers.

A growing population is not ubiquitous throughout the Great Plains (Figure 1.3). In fact, an unique out-migration process plagues its rural communities. One line of lyrics in the song titled *Down Home* performed by the country music group Alabama expresses how many young residents in rural communities feel. The song conveys the love the artist feels for his small, hometown and its slow pace of life, but he remembers feeling differently when he was younger. One line of the lyrics says that when he was a boy, he could not wait to leave that place. Typically, young adults do in fact leave their rural communities to pursue higher education or careers beyond agriculture [Rathge and Highman 1998; Adamchak et al. 1999]. This phenomenon has been termed age-selective migration.

William Wyckoff provides us one example of this process in Niobrara County, Wyoming. He discovered that local ranches could not produce a sufficient amount of new jobs for young adults entering the workforce. As a result, the youth migrate elsewhere in search of employment or other opportunities [Wyckoff 2002].

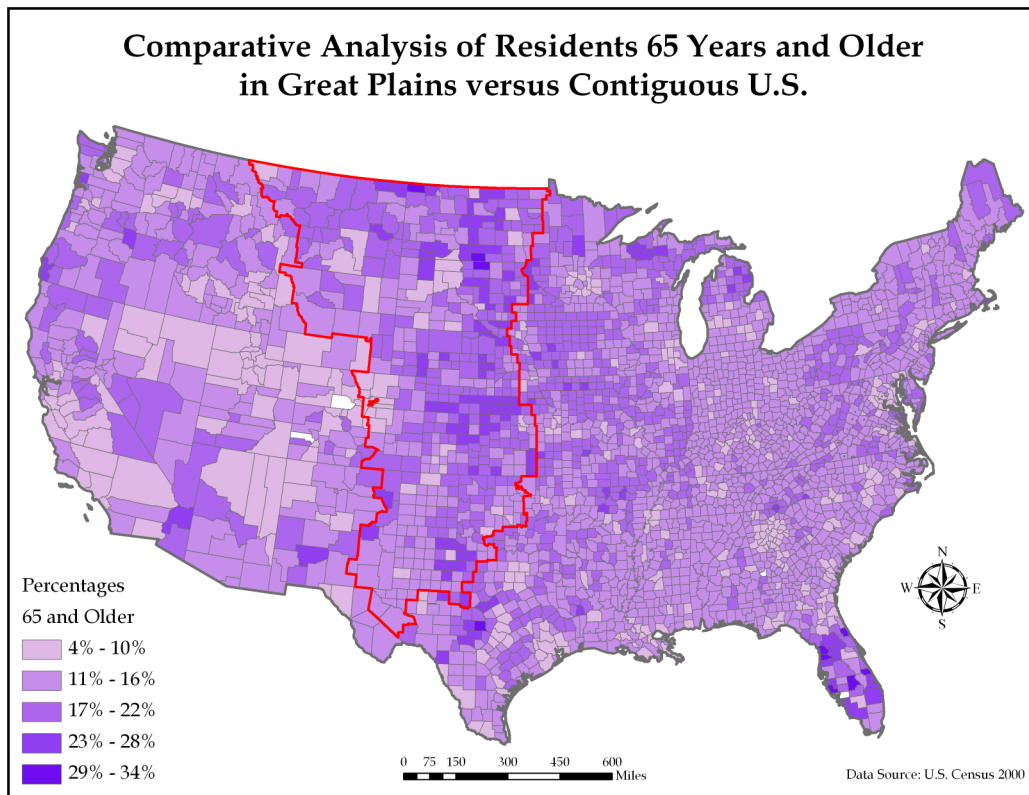
Figure 1.3 Population Change at County Level in the Great Plains. Map by author.



Consecutive years of age-selective out-migration have created a skewed age distribution in rural communities (Figure 1.4) [Albrecht 1993; Adamchak et al. 1999; Wyckoff 2002; Popper and Popper 2006]. In one-third of the Great Plains counties, senior citizens (people aged 65 and over) comprise more than 15 percent of the total population [Rathge and Highman 1998]. Another statistic shows that the Great Plains contains 97 of the 99 counties in the United States that have a median population at least 85 years old [Egan 2003; Shortridge 2004]. Places with a dominant elderly population, witness lower levels of natural increase, because there are proportionally fewer residents physically able to have children [Froelich 2001]. The miniscule growth contributions brought forth by natural increase and in-migration are offset by prolonged natural

decrease and most pronounced out-migration. This has resulted in a continual population decline for the past five decades [Rathge and Highman 1998; Froelich 2001; Wyckoff 2002].

Figure 1.4 Predominant Elderly Population in Great Plains. Map by author.



A declining population has repercussions to a rural community's economy. In his article, *Life on the Margin: The Evolution of the Waning West*, William Wyckoff [2002] explains that most Great Plains rural communities have experienced cycles of good and bad economic times. These communities have relied heavily on jobs that focus on resource extraction. As such, their economies have historically ebbed and flowed or boomed and busted. The loyal remaining residents in these aging, economically

depressed communities must adapt to the reality of fewer services and employment opportunities, lower home values and income, as well as minimal healthcare services [Rowley 1998; Wyckoff 2002; Shortridge 2004].

Ironically, these deeply rooted individuals readily endure inconveniences and obstacles in exchange for what they believe to be a better quality of life and a slower pace of change [Wyckoff 2002]. Many elderly residents in Great Plains rural communities have chosen to spend their remaining years in a place with much meaning but little to no means. In other words, these residents have strong ties or attachment to their community despite the hardships that accompany their place of residence [Wyckoff 2002]. In some cases, residents of the Great Plains are also forced to endure natural disasters such as prolonged drought and tornadoes. In 2007, the residents of Greensburg, Kansas, were compelled to make such a decision. The purpose of this thesis is to better understand how the May 4, 2007, tornado affected the elderly's attachment to place in Greensburg, Kansas.

Attachment to place is a bond formed between a person and a place, which incorporates a heightened familiarity of a place and is strengthened through repeated visits to the place. These types of relationships can take on different meanings and serve different purposes to individuals primarily based on their age. For younger individuals, places of attachment usually conjure pleasant memories and emotions associated with their childhood. However, the elderly's place attachment tends to also serve practical purposes such as reify their identity, aiding them in their negotiation of their community, and prolonging their independence. Place attachment in the lives of the elderly is further explored in Chapter 2. It may be important to mention that these bonds can be precarious

in nature because they rely on a place's outward appearance staying the same. If visible change occurs to a place whether from urban renewal, a natural disaster or any other cause, it is likely that the bond between the person and place would change as well [Lewis 1979].

Study Area

Natural disasters affect nearly all parts of the globe. One study concluded that on average 30 natural disasters occurred worldwide each year between 1945 and 1986 [Glickman, Golding, and Silverman 1992; Tobin and Montz 1997]. In order for a force of nature to be considered a natural disaster, it must directly impact a man-made settlement. Among the forces of nature included in the study were tornadoes. Although many of the 600 to 1,000 tornados that occur each year in the U.S. never come in contact with population centers, some cause great amounts of damage to communities [Atkisson, Petak, and Alesch 1984; Tobin and Montz 1997]. The majority of tornado-affected communities are located in a region within the Great Plains known as *Tornado Alley* [Bluestein 2006].

On May 4th, 2007, *Tornado Alley* lived up to its name when a supercell in western Kansas produced a 1.7-mile wide EF-5 tornado with winds estimated at over 205 mph. The tornado struck Greensburg, Kansas, obliterating 95% of the town [Graham 2009]. The morning light brought into full view the extent of the devastation. Houses, businesses, and churches were leveled to their foundations. Trees were stripped of their leaves and branches. The water tower that bore the town's name, once able to be seen from miles away, laid in twisted heaps of metal. Any building that had not been entirely demolished looked like a dollhouse with walls missing making the interior of homes

visible to the passerby. Local resident, Mike Case [2009], compared the sight of Greensburg the morning after the tornado to photographs that he had seen of the affects of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The estimated 5% of the town that escaped the full wrath of the tornado was comprised of a few houses primarily located in the eastern part of town near the grain elevator.

The residents of Greensburg, Kansas, would never be the same after May 4, 2007. On that night, 11 people lost their lives as a result of the tornado that swept through the town. After the estimated 1,500 survivors were assisted and evacuated from the affected area, authorities sealed off the town to unauthorized individuals until it was deemed safe. Survivors found themselves displaced from their homes and forced to cope with the implications of a natural disaster. Furthermore, Greensburg residents faced the ultimate decision of whether to rebuild their beloved town or to move away.

Mayor Bob Dixon explains, “The only thing we had left was our relationships with one another so we did everything together. We worshipped together. We ate together. Shared adversity drew folks closer [Graham 2009].” Each other is all many of the survivors had after the tornado. Possibly the thought of losing that too was part of the reason they banded together and decided to rebuild Greensburg. About 800 people and approximately 60 businesses pledged to return to Greensburg and rebuild [Graham 2009].

The city administrator, Steve Hewitt, and local citizens saw an opportunity to start over with a clean canvas. They did not want to duplicate the town that existed before the disaster. That town was plagued with chronic depopulation and offered few employment opportunities. As a result, the *Green* initiative was born in hopes of creating a

sustainable community that would provide new opportunities in Greensburg and lead to an increase in the town's population.

Greensburg was to become the Greenest City in America by utilizing energy efficient building methods, incorporating alternative energy sources, and attracting eco-friendly industries [Graham 2009]. Essentially, Greensburg would become a model community or microcosm of sustainable-development. The town could be used as a showcase and teaching tool in how to live with the environment in an environmentally conscientious manner. However, not all community members of Greensburg were in favor of these great changes and goals of the "New" Greensburg.

For the most part, the elderly population in Greensburg did not embrace the *Green* initiative. They feared the rebuilt town would not resemble their familiar hometown that they remembered and loved so well. The fact that Greensburg's predominant, elderly population experienced deep-seated feelings of attachment to their hometown before the tornado and now stood by the wayside as it was transformed into something they did not embrace motivated my study.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to better understand how the May 4th, 2007, tornado affected the elderly's emotional connection to Greensburg. I intend on exploring this idea by way of three research questions. First, how did the tornado on May 4th, 2007, affect Greensburg's cultural landscape? Second, how has Greensburg's cultural landscape been affected by the initiative to build *Green*? Last, in what ways have the elderly population's emotional attachment to Greensburg been affected by the modified cultural landscape?

The findings of my thesis are noteworthy, because they provide insight into the role that the cultural landscape and relationships have in the elderly's place attachment. In other words, it provides a better understanding of which components of a community are important to someone in their advanced years. Every day an estimated 10,000 Baby Boomers reach retirement age [Abts 2009]. This rate of retirement will continue for the next 20 years. With this in mind, a question is posed. Where will all of these recent retirees go after they break the shackles that formerly tied them down to their current location?

Masses of Baby Boomers will likely return to their former hometowns. As one's remaining time on Earth diminishes, a pull or longing to go back to the place where they spent their youth is more strongly felt [Fauntleroy 1997]. The small-town communities that are in tune with what is important to this aged demographic and can accommodate them will likely attract more people than just its former residents. The insight into what the elderly value in a community is useful information to these small towns, because an opportunity exists for them to capitalize on the migration of Baby Boomers.

Research Methods

In order to help answer my research questions, I approached the collection of data and information from a variety of different research methods. Repeat photography is a technique that can illustrate landscape change. In this method, one compares two or more photographs of the same scene that were photographed over the space of numerous years. This allows the viewer to see visible change in the landscape. William Wyckoff utilized this technique to understand the morphology of Montana landscapes. He compared photographs taken by Montana state highway engineers during the 1920s and 1930s to

his own present day photographs [Wyckoff 2006]. Photographs are thought of, “as mirrors with a memory,” and “faithful witnesses” [Goin 2001, 363]. This method has the ability to demonstrate landscape change more evocatively than words alone and with less reflexivity bias.

In the spirit of William Wyckoff’s work, I utilized before and after photographs in my study in order to determine visible change on Greensburg’s cultural landscape caused by the tornado. I acquired pre- and post-disaster photographs of Greensburg from postcards, local and former residents, yearbooks, and online news clippings and websites. The before and after photographs were arranged in an aesthetically pleasing manner to allow the reader to visually compare the change on Greensburg’s cultural landscape caused by the tornado.

My second research question focuses on the implications of using *Green* building methods on Greensburg’s cultural landscape. I implemented two methods to address this particular question. Again, I used before and after photographs to illustrate visible landscape change. Photographs were acquired from local and former residents, news articles, and websites. They were arranged for readers to make a visual comparison. Secondly, a few questions were included in my interviews to learn which objects on the modified cultural landscape were *Green* so that I could photograph them and share their visual impact. Through these two methods, I was able to better comprehend the role rebuilding *Green* had on Greensburg’s cultural landscape.

Local residents are commonly the true experts on their place of residence [Salter 2001]. With this in mind, I devised open-ended interview questions with the intent that they would encourage my interviewees to share their feelings and thoughts about their

community. My interviewing methods paralleled those of Cary de Wit because of his success in interviewing High Plains residents. He suggests interviews should resemble conversations and should begin with a few standard questions to initiate a flow of conversation [de Wit 2003]. A few conversation starter examples outlined by de Wit resemble something like: “What do you like about living here,” or “How would you compare this to other places you have lived,” and “Why did you move here or return” [de Wit 2003, 15]. These questions can foster a relaxed atmosphere, which allows respondents to simply tell their story [de Wit 2003].

With Cary de Wit’s suggestions in mind, I sought to understand how the tornado aftermath and modified cultural landscape affected the elderly’s attachment to Greensburg. In this study, elderly refers to people at least 65 years old. However, some retired individuals that are less than 65 years of age were included, because they have adopted the elderly lifestyle. My initial interviews blossomed out of chance encounters with locals during the festivities of the second anniversary of the May 4, 2007, tornado. After establishing a rapport with my interviewee, I simply listened to their story. I occasionally guided the conversation to matters of place attachment, but I primarily allowed the interviewee to lead the conversation and discuss what they felt comfortable disclosing.

I acquired further interviewees, totaling 45 in all, through “snowball sampling,” which relies on existing friendships, family, or professional networks of consenting interviewees to find future interviewees [Bernard 1988; Bradshaw and Stratford 2000]. Overall, my interviewing process began with elderly residents who rebuilt in Greensburg after the tornado. The first part concluded when I felt that I had a good understanding of

the rebuilders' stories. Then, in order to better understand the big picture of elderly's change in attachment to Greensburg, I shifted my focus to the former elderly residents who moved away.

For three interviewees, who exhibited the very essence of a change in attachment to place, I employed an additional research data collection method. For these key informants, I administered a mental map exercise to acquire a deeper insight in to what places were personally significant to them before and after the natural disaster. These people were chosen based on an observable change in attachment as well as their interest in my research. The only instruction was to draw a map or a picture of their town before and after the May 4th, 2007, tornado. I provided little instruction to the participants for fear of influencing their maps.

The above methods elicited the most immediate source of data to help answer my research questions. However, the data were augmented through additional methods (Figure 1.5). While addressing my questions pertaining to the landscape, I conducted a content analysis of archival data in order to better understand the pre- and post-disaster cultural landscape. This led to an analysis of the cultural landscape so that additional information beyond what was visually apparent could be provided. Lastly, it is important to note that some interviews evolved into opportunities to gather more data by way of participant observation. Examples of this include attending local churches, coffee hours, events associated with anniversaries of the tornado, and building dedications. By approaching my research questions with several methods, I feel more confident about the veracity of my findings.

Figure 1.5 Chart of Methods Implemented

Research Questions		
1) How did tornado on May 4th, 2007, affect Greensburg's cultural landscape?	2) How has Greensburg's cultural landscape been affected by the initiative to build Green?	3) In what ways have the elderly population's emotional attachment to Greensburg been affected by the modified cultural landscape?
M E T H O D S Before & After Photographs Cultural Landscape Analysis Content Analysis of Archival Data Interviews	Before & After Photographs Interviews Cultural Landscape Analysis Content Analysis of Archival Data Participant Observation	45 Interviews Mental Map Exercises Participant Observation

Organization

I have divided my thesis into six chapters. The first provides a general overview of where the Great Plains is located, the inner workings of its population changes, a brief insight to the relationships people form with places, and the scope of my study. Chapter 2 reviews place attachment literature and primarily focuses on place attachment's role in the lives of the elderly. The third chapter explores the history of the study area, Greensburg, Kansas, in order to provide a better understanding of its current demographics. Chapter 4 articulates the results and findings of my fieldwork regarding the changes to Greensburg's cultural landscape. The fifth chapter shares my findings about the implications the tornadic event had on the elderly's attachment to Greensburg. The final chapter summarizes and concludes the findings of my research as well as potential avenues for additional research.

CHAPTER 2 - People's Attachment to Place

We have known for centuries that some places hold a special significance to people. Ancient cultures considered certain places special because of a belief that supernatural spirits inhabited them [Jackson 1996]. Individuals routinely paid reverence to these spirits, and as a result, they developed a familiarity and knowledge of these unique places [Jackson 1996]. For example, it was quite common for Romans to believe that living spirits dwelled in certain places and protected them against enemies [Lewis 1979].

Although within modern society few people believe spirits inhabit places, a bond between people and a place is still common. The Anglo-Mormons of Chihuahua, Mexico, for instance, to this day still feel strongly attached to the Mormon homeland located in the American West [Smith and White 2004]. These types of relationships are referred to by many names including: rootedness, sense of place, belongingness, and insiderness [Giuliani 2003]. I refer to this bond as place attachment. According to psychologists Setha Low and Irwin Altman [1992], place attachment is defined as an emotional tie between a person and a place. Others with cultural anthropology backgrounds tend to focus on the associated feelings a place conjures, the role experience plays as to where place attachments occur, or the elevated meaning of place to an individual [Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992; Milligan 1998]. Disciplines such as psychology, cultural anthropology, and cultural geography have sought to better understand the intricacies of these types of place relationships for decades.

Psychologist Marc Fried in 1963 provides us with the first recognized place attachment study [Giuliani 2003]. In examining Boston's West End, he discovered that a vast majority of the residents were so strongly attached to their neighborhood that they experienced deep sorrow similar to that of losing a loved one after being evicted through an act of urban renewal [Fried 1963]. After Fried published his findings, others began to expand our understanding of the place attachment concept. Scholars from a variety of disciplines including cultural geography have contributed to the expanding body of literature.

At the end of the 1960s, cultural geographers began to shift the focus of their work to incorporate place attachment studies by way of a humanistic approach [Unwin 1996]. One of the leading scholars in humanistic geography is Yi-Fu Tuan, possibly one of the most famous geographers outside the discipline of geography. According to Tuan, "Humanism provided geographers with the central task of reflecting upon geographical phenomena with the ultimate purpose of achieving a better understanding of man and his condition" [Tuan 1976, 267]. In 1974, Tuan further explains that place attachment can only exist with an appropriately sized place [Tuan 1974]. Scale is important because of limitations in our ability to perceive stimuli through our five senses. Tuan asserts that neither exceedingly large nor exceptionally small places are easily perceived by individuals [Tuan 1974]. For example, an individual can appreciate the scale of a lawn, but the minute details of each individual blade of grass are overlooked. Humans also have a difficulty perceiving exceedingly large places. For instance, even if an individual has traversed the United States many times, they may still struggle to comprehend the distance of 1,000 miles or more [Tuan 1974]. Our five senses limit our ability to perceive

and comprehend places. Therefore, we develop our strongest feelings of attachment to places of manageable size.

Appropriately sized places allow us to develop a heightened sense of familiarity. The importance of knowledge derived from familiarity can be exemplified through word choice in the Spanish language. Spanish speakers recognize limitations exist for the degree of knowledge an individual can possess of a place by using two different words. The first verb *saber* is used to acknowledge that something exists. For instance, it may be that one is aware that a city exists in Kansas by the name of Wichita. However, when referring to a person's more intimate knowledge of a place the word *conocer* is used. Because the city is so large and undergoes continual change, it is nearly impossible to understand every detail of the city. The Spanish verb *conocer* implies a level of familiarity and an element of frequent visits, which is characteristic of place attachment.

Geographer, Peirce Lewis, provides an example of the role of familiarity in the development of place attachment. He explains that in the 1930s residents of Detroit experienced economic difficulties that contributed to some neighborhoods becoming unsafe and riddled with crime [Lewis 1979]. By the 1950s, Detroit city planners hoped to rid the city of these issues by demolishing nearly all dilapidated structures within the downtown. As a result, many residents were left homeless and fled the city. Lewis concludes that they had little reason to return to their former residence, because it no longer resembled home. Because the city dissected the former neighborhoods with freeways and removed once familiar buildings, residents of Detroit no longer found their neighborhoods familiar. Therefore, their attachment to place was severed.

Place Attachment Intensity Over Time

Not only does people's attachment to place become heightened with greater knowledge and familiarity, place attachment also requires the passage of time. Geographer Richard Nostrand's *homeland* concept includes five components with the fifth focusing on the time people spend living in a place [Nostrand 1993]. As Nostrand explains [1993], homelands consist of a land so loved by its people to the extent that they refer to it as home. Terry Jordan expands on Nostrand's definition and further emphasizes the passage of time element by stating that a homeland is a geographical area inhabited for an extended period of time by a self-conscious group of people with a strong sense of attachment to place [Jordan 1993]. Geographer Michael Conzen believes, *indiginity*, or a long inhabitation, contributes to their ability to form and strengthen an attachment [Conzen 1993]. These definitions suggest that people's place attachment strengthens over time.

One example that demonstrates the relationship between attachment to place strength and duration of time comes from the deep-seated feelings *Nuevo Mexicanos* have for their home. They refer to this bond as *la querencia*. University of New Mexico professor, Enrique Lamadrid, writes, "The pull of *querencia* is never stronger than when one's time on Earth is almost through [Fauntleroy 1997, 26]." As people age in place, the deep-seated feelings that they have for a place seem to intensify. This illustrates the deep, emotional attachment directed to a place that continues to strengthen over time.

People's attachment to place goes well beyond the homeland concept. Non-homeland related place attachments also display a relation between duration and attachment strength. One of Geographer Ben Marsh's studies focuses on people's place

attachment in the coal mining towns of central Pennsylvania. These anthracite rich valleys once provided an abundance of employment opportunities for immigrants in the decades after the Industrial Revolution [Marsh 1987]. Nearly a century later the coal mining industry collapsed. Even though these towns currently offer few employment opportunities and services, about one-third to one-half of the 1920 population still inhabits them. The people's deep place attachment has intensified over time and reduces their likelihood of leaving even when living conditions became hazardous to their health [Marsh 1987]. Tuan [1974] notes that the same phenomenon occurs elsewhere with people who are reluctant to leave their familiar, beloved, old neighborhood for a new place of residence. He explains that this is especially true among older people [Tuan 1974].

Place Attachment's Role in the Elderly's Lives

Thus far we recognize that people form bonds to places where significant events take place, and they associate favorable emotions with them when encountered or recollected. However, place attachment takes on added meaning in the lives of the elderly. Based on his research among the elderly in Appalachia, geographer Graham Rowles asserts that the concept of *insideness* is at the cornerstone of the elderly's place attachment [Rowles 1990]. Insideness, as Rowles defines, is an intimate bond to a place that is associated with one's personal history and differs qualitatively from space outside [Rowles 1990]. Insideness, as it is used here, can be subdivided into autobiographical, physical, and social [Rowles 1990].

Autobiographical Insideness

Rowles's autobiographical insideness pertains to the ability of a place to possess multiple layers of personal meaning over time [Rowles 1990]. A long-time resident may look around his or her community and see more than is visually apparent. A closed school, for instance, could still stir found memories of spending weekends on the playground as a child. The cultural landscape may change over time, but memories associated with places live on. In this regard, place attachment becomes a vehicle for the elderly that is capable of transporting them back to significant and memorable events. In other words, the elderly project their lives on the landscape and it reminds them of who they are and their unique story. Repeated interactions with places strengthen attachment and reinforce the elderly's identity. In this way a place becomes a biography of their lives [Rowles 1990; Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992].

Physical Insideness

As the elderly reach their advanced years, their sensory organs and physical capabilities deteriorate. However, place attachment has the potential to help compensate for some of their body's shortcomings. Rowles explains that physical insideness combines the gained familiarity of a place along with their long-time residence to act as an aid or crutch to their diminished senses. Elderly individuals who experience a physical insideness with their community would likely find it easier to negotiate their activity space as compared to someone who does not possess an intimate knowledge of his or her surroundings. Rowles exemplifies this concept by sharing the story of an eighty-four-year-old man with failing vision. Although his sight is poor, this gentleman navigates his usual path to pick up his mail at the post office without fear for his safety.

Likewise, he is able to maintain his social relationships with the friends he encounters along the way in part because of his familiarity with the place [Rowles 1990]. The elderly's continued ability to navigate through their environment reinforces a sense of independence and continued competence, which may contribute to the vitality of their social life [Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992]. This in turn ties them more and more to the place.

Social Insideness

Interacting with friends and acquaintances is closely associated with Rowles's third subdivision of *insideness*, termed social insideness. Cultural geographer Jeffrey Smith's work on *acequias* in El Cerrito, New Mexico, illustrates a communal example of social insideness. Every year the *Nuevo Mexicanos* band together to remove accumulated debris in their irrigation ditches [Smith et al. 2001]. Although the elderly play a less active role in physically cleaning ditches, they still cherish the opportunity to spend time with friends and family. The place and event help reinforce their ties to the community. John Brinkerhoff Jackson attributes these types of gatherings with being able to invoke, "A sense of fellowship based on a shared experience [Jackson 1996, 159]." As I will discuss in Chapter 4, fellowship or social interaction is very significant in developing a strong attachment to place.

Social insideness also involves informal and spontaneous social interactions as well. These may include playing card games, meeting for coffee, or dining together. Social interaction contributes so greatly to place attachment that psychologists Setha Low and Irwin Altman speculate that it holds more significance in determining where

individuals form place attachments than the actual characteristics of the place [Low and Altman 1992]. With this in mind, let us direct our focus to the tendencies of the elderly.

The literature suggests that the elderly commonly remain in a place or community for long durations [Ponzetti 2003]. Over time, the elderly tend to interact with neighbors and community members, which fosters a setting where life-long acquaintances and friendships can form and likely can be relied on in times of need [Rowles 1990]. For instance, Lillian Hoffhaus [2009], an 89-year-old resident of Great Bend, Kansas, suffers from severe rheumatoid arthritis, lower back pain, and the affects of cancer. Yet she is still able to live alone without professional care. Some daily tasks, however, are beyond her physical capabilities such as wheeling her trash can out for collection. Therefore, Lillian calls on the assistance of her neighbor and friend once a week to handle the trash detail. The continued independence the elderly maintain by being able to call on assistance from fellow community members contributes to their feelings of strong place attachment to their hometown.

The literature on place attachment is sizeable. It tells us that the bonds people make to a place strengthen over time and with repeated visits. We also recognize that place attachment can serve practical purposes that aid the elderly in their daily lives. Past scholarly contributions have taught us much about place attachment and what is necessary it to develop. However, some specific avenues of attachment have yet to be fully explored.

One particularly approach may look at what happens to people's place attachment after a community has been destroyed by a natural disaster. What would be the implications to the elderly's attachment to place if their surroundings were rendered

unrecognizable? Would they flee like the residents of Detroit in Peirce Lewis's study or would they rebuild? Are repeated visits to a place necessary to maintain a strong attachment to it? The purpose of my research is to help answer these questions by better understanding how the tornado on May 4, 2007, in Greensburg, Kansas, has affected the town's elderly's population and their attachment to place.

CHAPTER 3 - Boom and Bust of Greensburg, Kansas's

Population

Many small towns in rural America have experienced periods of prosperity and stagnation. During the 19th Century, the Industrial Revolution ushered in an economic boom. The transition from labor-intensive methods of production to a more mechanized process had a profound positive effect on many communities. Likewise, during the 1930s many of the same towns felt the pressures of the economic bust often referred to as the *Dirty Thirties* [Unger 1994]. Unwise farming practices along with a prolonged drought contributed to soil degradation and reduced the ability of the land to produce sustained high crop yields. People in those small towns whose livelihood depended on crop sales experienced the ramifications of one of the worst economic recessions in U.S. history. Cycles of boom and bust repeatedly occurred throughout the history of rural America and show no indication of ceasing in the future.

The rise and fall of many Great Plains small towns is heavily dependent on their connectivity to larger transportation networks [Borchert 1967; Burns 1982]. Geographer John Borchert identifies five epochs of transportation technology: The Sail-Wagon Epoch (1790-1830), The Iron Horse Epoch (1830-1870), The Steel-Rail Epoch (1870-1920), The Auto-Air-Amenity Epoch (1920-1970), and The Satellite-Electronic-Jet Propulsion Epoch (1970-present). As each new transportation method has been introduced, communities face the decision to adapt or suffer adverse consequences. Those

communities that have not adapted have frequently seen their local economy shrink and population size decline. Many of these small towns are situated within the Great Plains and exhibit limited economic activity and an aging population [Wyckoff 2002].

A History of Booms and Busts

Located in the heart of the Great Plains, Greensburg, Kansas, has experienced the same economic peaks and valleys. Like many other communities in the region, much of its economic and population fluctuation can be tied to changes in transportation technology. During the 20th Century, residents of Greensburg witnessed more stagnant times than periods of prosperity. As a result, the population of Greensburg has become skewed towards the elderly. This chapter discusses the history of Greensburg, Kansas, with the intent of better understanding its demographic change over time. Furthermore, this chapter explains where Greensburg was demographically just prior to May 4, 2007.

Greensburg, Kansas, was first settled in the late 1800s by Cassius “Cash” Hopkins, Tom Pritchard, John Teda, and Frank Fisher. Like other early pioneers who settled the West, these men staked claim to 160 acres of undeveloped land under the Homestead Act [Popper and Popper 2006]. The first mode of public transportation to serve the area was stagecoach. Because railroads had not reached southwestern Kansas at this time, local settlers petitioned Cannonball Green, the owner of Cannonball Stage Company, to make their settlement a stop along his stagecoach line. As a result, Greensburg’s population flourished. On April 28, 1884, the town of Greensburg, Kansas, named in honor of the stagecoach owner, was officially founded [Hayse et al. 1979a]. Greensburg became the area’s principal transportation hub. The next goal of the town’s leaders was to put Greensburg on the map politically.

Few things were more important to a frontier town's success than becoming the county seat [Fuguitt 1965]. Not only do county seats serve governmental and commercial purposes, but they also tend to attract industry and new residents. For all of these reasons Greensburg's civic leaders took steps to make Greensburg the county seat of Kiowa County. The nearby town of Janesville was vying for the same county seat. However, Janesville was not connected to a stagecoach line like Greensburg. As a result, Greensburg was awarded the county seat. The selection of Greensburg spelled the end for Janesville with many of its residents moving to Greensburg [Hayse et al. 1979a]. By the mid 1880s, an estimated 3,300 settlers were believed to live there [McCoy 1937]. When the Post Office opened on March 23, 1886, approximately 75 businesses, two churches, a city jail, a drug store, a school, and the luxurious Queen City Hotel were already in operation [Hayse et al. 1979a]. Greensburg was officially incorporated as the county seat of Kiowa County on June 18, 1886 [Hayse et al., 1979b]. It was the epitome of a booming prairie town.

By the late 1880s, railroads had reached western Kansas. City officials knew that they must reach out to this new mode of transportation or their town would suffer the consequences. Some new settlements went as far as tagging the word "City" on to their name to persuade the railroad companies into thinking that they were a thriving prairie town capable of supporting a rail line. Fortunately for Greensburg, two railroad companies took interest in laying track through their town without the need of changing their name [Haviland 1935; McCoy 1937; Anderson 1937; Hayes et al., 1979b]. In February of 1887, the race commenced between two railroads. The Kingman, Pratt and Western railroad, a subsidiary of the Santa Fe Railroad, started laying track west from

Wichita, Kansas. It's main competitor the Chicago, Kansas, and Nebraska line, affiliated with the Rock Island Railroad, began laying track west from Meade, Kansas [McCoy 1937]. According to Ed Schoenberger [2009], the Kingman, Pratt and Western railroad reached Greensburg first in 1887. When the railroad rolled into town, settlers had direct connection from Greensburg to Wichita, Kansas.

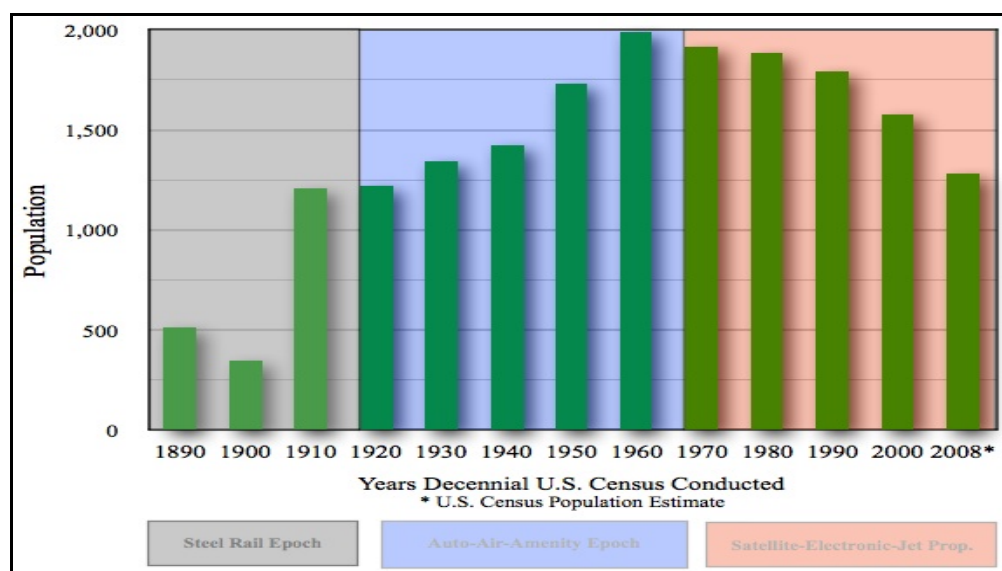
Beyond transportation, the railroad also provided employment opportunities for area residents. Greensburg was asked by the railroad company to dig a well to supply water for their locomotives [Clark 1979]. After weighing the request, residents began digging the well in 1887. Several crews of 12 to 15 men physically dug into the earth, while other crews carted native stone from the Medicine river 12 miles south of Greensburg to case the well walls [Ed Schoenberger, 2009]. One year later the well was complete ultimately measuring 32 feet in diameter and plunging 109 feet down into the Earth making it the world's largest hand-dug well [Greensburg Chamber of Commerce 1939]. The engineering feat not only provided employment to many laborers for one year, but it also gave the community a great source of pride [Clark 1979]. Few imagined the end of these prosperous and joyous times was imminent.

Frontier towns lived and died by the railroad, including the town of Greensburg. In 1896, the Pratt and Western railroad decided to abandon their line that passed through Greensburg. As the company explained, a steady decline in passengers made the line no longer profitable. Unfortunately, this rail line was the town's lifeline to the outside world. A combination of factors, including the abandonment of the line, a prolonged drought, mortgages due, contributed to a population decrease from 2,756 in 1896 to 254 in just two years [McCoy 1937; Hayse et al. 1979a]. It is likely that the line would have

stayed in operation if the railroad had made connections with Dodge City in neighboring Ford County [Ed Schoenberger, 2009]. Greensburg would have been the midway and refueling stop on the line between of Dodge City and Wichita, Kansas. Because Ford County did not permit the rail line to enter, Greensburg became the terminal point on the line. If Greensburg were going to survive, it would have to attract another rail line.

The Rock Island & Pacific Railway Company arrived in Greensburg in 1897 along with a decade full of prosperity. Greensburg’s business district began to project the image of a permanent town. Buildings slowly made the transition from wooden to brick. During this period, merchants and banks constructed five new buildings made of brick [Hayse et al. 1979]. Moreover, booming businesses attracted more and more settlers. From 1900 to 1910, Greensburg recorded its largest population increase in the town’s history (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Greensburg's Population in Relation to Borchert's Transportation Epochs. Created by author.



In June of 1910, Greensburg welcomed Standard Oil Company with a 50-year lease to build warehouses and storage facilities for illuminating oils, coal oils, and benzene [Hayse et al., 1979b]. One year later residents passed municipal bonds to construct the thriving town's first electric light and power plant. The plant would supply power for Greensburg and later expand to meet the needs of its neighboring town, Haviland. Greensburg was booming once again because it embraced the latest form of transportation technology. The railroad had kept Greensburg on the map. Soon Greensburg would be forced to adapt again.

By the 1920s, a town's success was no longer determined solely by its adoption of the newest mode of transportation. America's workforce had shifted from being primarily employed in the primary and secondary sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and manufacturing, to the tertiary sector [Borchert 1967]. Now successful towns were those that not only adopted the latest mode of transportation, but also offered ample employment opportunities in the service sector. Those places that became amenity rich were transformed from small towns into cities. John Borchert [1967, 307] refers to this process as "Growth breeds growth." He explains that highly populated places are more likely to grow in population size because people tend to congregate where services and amenities already exist.

A significant population already resided in Greensburg primarily because of its role as a railroad transportation hub. By the 1920s, many Americans, including residents of Greensburg, owned automobiles [Borchert 1967; Hayse et al. 1979a]. At this time, dirt roads had already begun replacing many rail lines. This shift from rails to roads

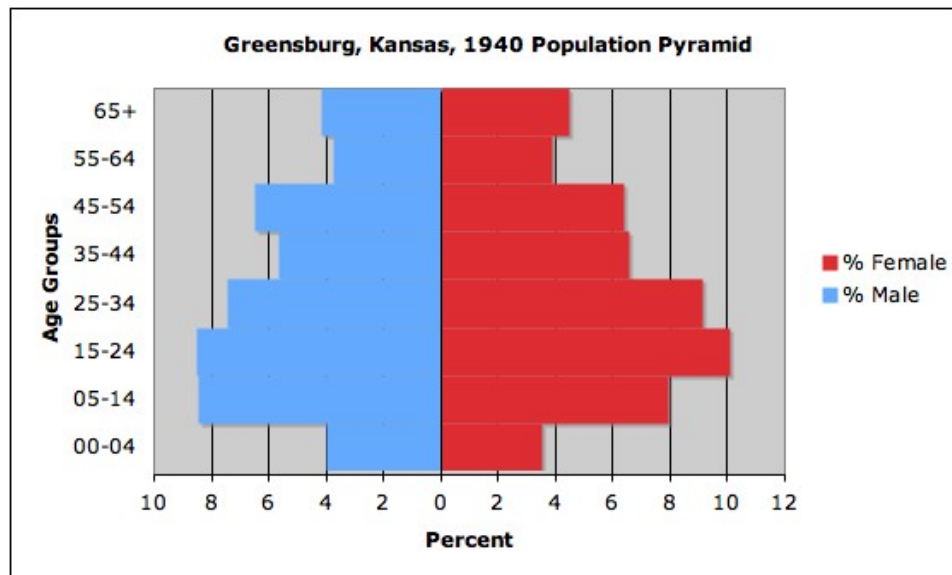
facilitated a need for improved roads and highways. Greensburg yet again was on the forefront of embracing the newest technology. Plans to build a U.S. Highway through Greensburg were already in motion. If Greensburg was to take full advantage of this changing transportation technology, it would have to change its focus once again.

Proximity to a highway became as indispensable to a town's success as was its location near a rail line in the 19th Century. In June of 1932, the Yant Construction Company of Omaha, Nebraska, built U.S. Highway 54, which passed through the town of Greensburg [Hayse et al., 1979b]. The company also paved Greensburg's Main Street. The newly surfaced street was peppered with shops, lodges, and restaurants geared for motorists. Greensburg had become a destination for the region's entertainment and services. Local Greensburg residents, Art and Helen Todd [2009], fondly recall driving to Main Street on Saturday nights especially during harvest season. The Todds estimate half of Kiowa County visited Greensburg on those nights to catch up on local news and chat about harvests. Others sought entertainment at the theater on Main Street, where silent films were shown [Art Todd, 2009; Helen Todd, 2009]. For many years, Greensburg prospered mainly because of its abundant local entertainment and services.

Greensburg's situation on U.S. Highway 54, along with its associated amenities and services, contributed to a population increase that lasted until the 1960s (Figure 3.1). The 1940 decennial census demographic statistics showed the end was coming. In 1940, the birth rate had begun to decline noticeably as indicated in the town's population profile (Figure 3.2). A low birth rate in conjunction with a large elderly population commonly is associated with population decline. Indeed, these population characteristics later proved to be early indicators that Greensburg's population was no longer growing.

By the 1970s, Greensburg struggled to meet the needs and wants of its residents. It was no longer a destination for local entertainment [Hayse et al. 1979a]. Residents bypassed Saturday evening social gatherings on Main Street for entertainment found in the larger, more distant cities, such as Wichita and Hutchinson. Greensburg also struggled to meet the employment needs of its residents. A shift from labor-intensive practices in agriculture to mechanized agriculture eliminated many jobs for local residents [Dimitri, Effland, and Conklin 2005]. In 1970, the town of Greensburg was struggling to keep its population.

Figure 3.2 Population Pyramid Created from 1940 U.S. Census Data. Created by author.



According to Borchert, the U.S. had once again shifted to a new transportation epoch in 1970. The new epoch focused on the advancements in computer technology, global communications, and intercontinental travel [Borchert 1967]. Many towns in the

Great Plains, including Greensburg, lacked jobs in these newly thriving economic sectors. Employment in many towns across the country rested upon automated technology. As for Greensburg, the new epoch marked the beginning of a steady population decline (Figure 3.3). However, some small towns in the Great Plains have maintained a constant population size while others have increased. The natural gas industry was one industry that provided employment to residents in some rural communities and helped sustain their population.

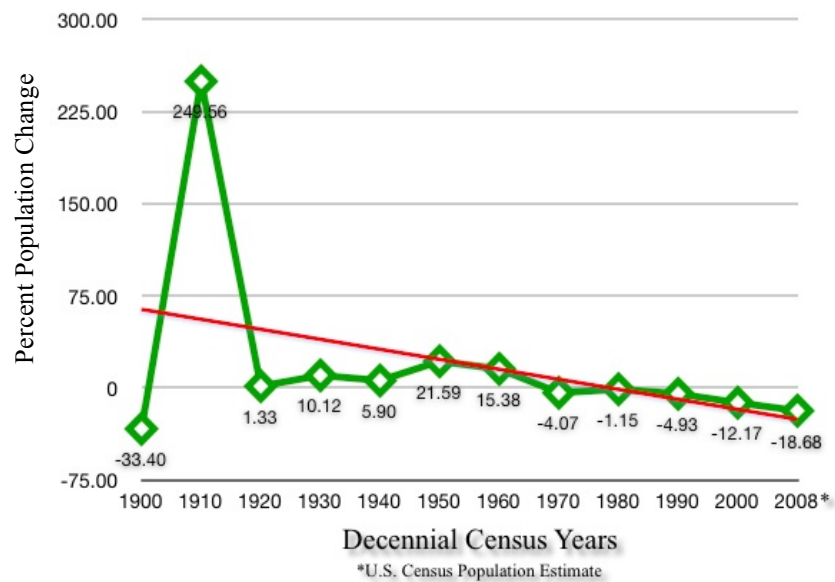
The distribution of natural gas relies on a network of highly pressurized pipelines. In order to maintain the necessary pressure for transmission, compressor stations are used. These stations are placed every 40 to 100 miles along the pipeline with the intent of maintaining even pressure in the pipeline and filtering out unwanted liquids [An, Li, and Gedra 2003]. Greensburg was located near several compressor stations that aided the flow of natural gas throughout the county. Until the 1970s, monitoring and maintaining natural gas pipeline compressor stations provided employment to many residents of Greensburg.

Art Todd, a native of Greensburg, recalls the time he devoted to the natural gas industry. Art spent part of his working career as a serviceman monitoring and servicing natural gas compressor stations near Greensburg. He associates the period that he worked on them with a thriving Greensburg [Art Todd, 2009]. However, all was about to change with the natural gas industry approaching a revolution in how they managed their compressor stations.

In the early 1970s, technological advancements provided natural gas companies a way to reduce their operating expenses, and they embraced it. By automating the

compressor stations, fewer workers were needed. The remaining jobs were specialized technicians trained in servicing automated stations. Art and his wife, Helen [2009], associate the decline of Greensburg to the time the stations were automated. A lack of well-paying jobs was one reason Greensburg struggled to maintain its population, but the younger generations had a somewhat different rationale for leaving.

Figure 3.3 Greensburg, Kansas, Percent Population Change. Created by author.



High school graduates often leave their community to pursue higher education [Wyckoff 2002]. Some communities in western Kansas such as Dodge City, Garden City, and Pratt have become home to community colleges that offer young adults an alternative to leaving their hometown and consequently have benefited from in-migration. Not only do community colleges constitute a significant component of university or college town economies, but they also provide between 30 and 50 percent of

its jobs [Manning and Viscek 1977]. For these reasons, small towns able to support a community college have fared better than ones without an institution of higher education.

Unfortunately for Greensburg, the community college established to serve its population is located in Pratt rather than Greensburg. Pratt Community College contributed to the growth of Pratt's population size. As a result, businesses, along with more employment opportunities, located in Pratt. Potentially the most significant of the new businesses was Wal-Mart. Not only was Greensburg unable to benefit from hosting a community college, but they were also bypassed by big-box stores—the newest economic booster at the time for small towns.

Unlike its competitors Kmart and Target, Wal-Mart primarily focuses on meeting the needs of consumers in small-town America [Graff and Ashton 1994]. Big-box stores, such as Wal-Mart, operate under what economists call the zero-sum game [Halebesky 2008]. Under zero-sum principles, there is a finite amount of economic activity within a community. For any new business to succeed it must take away customers from an existing competitor. In other words, big-box stores do not add to a local, small-town economy or create jobs; they compete directly with existing store for employees and customers.

More often than not, the arrival of big-box stores leads to their domination of the local retail market with small-town businesses losing customers [Stone 1997]. A Wal-Mart store that has served Pratt, Kansas, and area residents since 1983 provides insight into the distance people are willingly traveling to shop at big-box stores. According to Helen Todd [2009], many Greensburg residents routinely make a 62-mile roundtrip to stock up on cheaper groceries and to purchase products not sold in Greensburg.

Unfortunately for Greensburg, it is no longer the shopping destination it once was in the past.

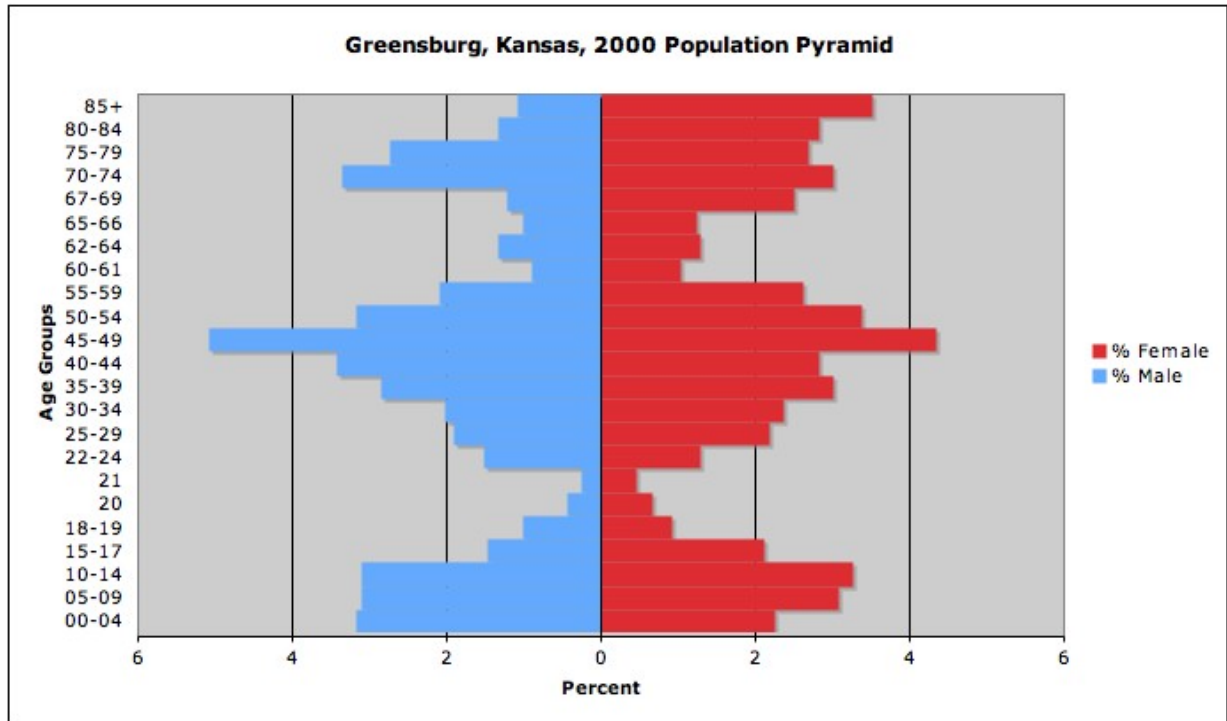
Historically, Greensburg has been at the forefront of most of the major technological or economic shifts. Because the small town was able to adapt to the changing times, it prospered until the 1970s. Since then, the reliance on and success of transportation hubs, like Greensburg, has diminished. As a result, Greensburg has struggled to provide ample employment opportunities for its employment-seeking residents. Because of its inability to embrace the newest technology or economic sector, many of the working-age residents moved away, leaving a predominantly elderly population.

Greensburg's demographic makeup has tipped towards an aged population. In fact, the elderly comprise a significant portion of Greensburg's residents (Figure 3.4). We have learned from Bill Wyckoff [2002] that the elderly tend to be more willing to reside in a place with fewer services and amenities in exchange for what they believe to be a slower pace of life and less change. The literature also suggests that elderly residents in small towns often form and rely on a strong attachment to place [Rowles 1990]. Therefore, one can infer that most small towns located in the Great Plains are viewed as places of attachment by their respective, predominantly elderly population.

Focusing on Greensburg's aged population, it seems likely that most of them have become attached to their hometown after many years of residence. Over the course of their lives, they likely have enjoyed many fond, shared experiences with friends and loved ones. Some of these experiences may have included witnessing new additions to the family at the local hospital, attending Friday night football games, celebrating

graduations, among others. Places where these events occurred in town act as mnemonic devices of these enjoyable events for the elderly and reinforce their attachment to Greensburg.

Figure 3.4 Population Pyramid Using 2000 U.S. Census Data. Created by author.



Unfortunately for Greensburg’s predominantly aged population, their beloved town was blown off the prairie. After the natural disaster, some younger residents saw an opportunity to reinvent their town and reverse the effects of rural depopulation. These individuals decided to rebuild *Green* by implementing environmentally friendly construction techniques and utilizing renewable energy sources. Janet West, the wife of one of Greensburg’s commissioners [2009], believes rebuilding *Green* will attract new residents to their beloved town and make it boom once again.

Much has changed in this small western Kansas town since the tornado destroyed it. Over three years have passed since the tornado struck this community, yet the rebuilding process is still ongoing and the emotional wounds are not completely healed. I seek to better understand how the May 4th, 2007, tornado has affected the elderly's emotional connection to Greensburg.

CHAPTER 4 - Greensburg's Modified Landscape

A position as a soil conservationist initially attracted Mike Case to Greensburg, Kansas. He and his wife, Jan, decided to accept the job and its location with the mindset that they would move after a couple of years [Mike Case, 2009]. Thirty years have passed and Greensburg now holds a special place in the hearts of Mike and Jan. They both agree that they have become deeply attached to their town. One year after Mike's retirement from the job that brought him to Greensburg, the devastating tornado flattened their beloved town. Mike's mother phoned that evening to check on their safety and well-being.

Mike answered his ringing cell phone, "Hi Mom. Yes, we're fine." Mike was at a loss for words before he solemnly uttered, "Everything is gone. Greensburg is destroyed."

After a moments pause on the phone, Mike's concerned mother asked, "Are you going to move away from Greensburg?"

Mike, fighting back strong emotions, replied, "Where else would I go?" After regaining his composure, he continued, "Greensburg is my home."

On the evening of May 4th, 2007, an EF-5 tornado struck Greensburg, Kansas. It remained on the ground in the town for only about five minutes. To those hunkered in basements and storm cellars, it seemed like an eternity [Scott Reinecke, 2009]. Nonetheless, the tornado had a profound impact on Greensburg's cultural landscape.

Before & Immediately After Cultural Landscape

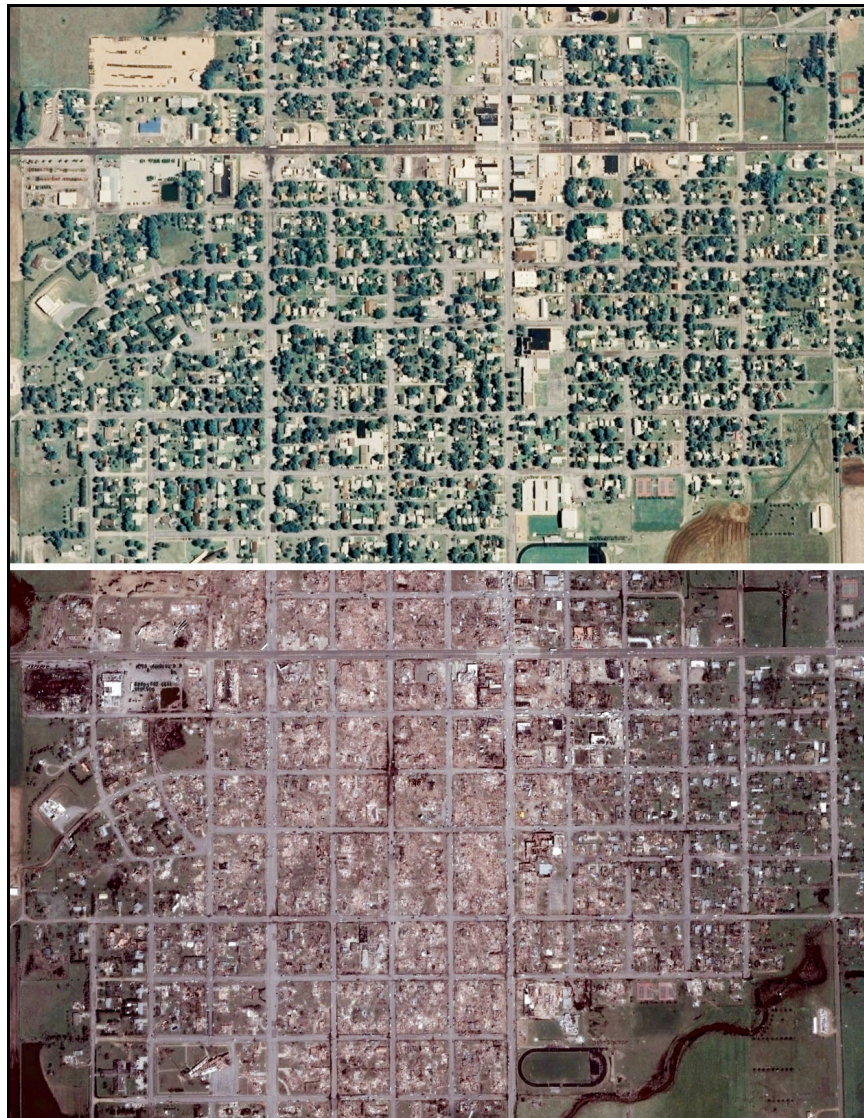
The powerful winds of the tornado reduced nearly everything in Greensburg to mounds of rubble. Trees were denuded of their leaves and branches. Greensburg's water tower was blown over spilling thousands of gallons of water and flooding several nearby basements. In fact, few things escaped the fury of the tornado. The areas of town that went unscathed, for the most part, were situated in the eastern part of town (Figure 4.1) [Shattuck 2008].

Downed power lines, broken natural gas lines, and debris created a dangerous environment in Greensburg immediately after the tornado. Local law enforcement and state officials evacuated all the tornado survivors until they deemed the area safe for residents to return. For some residents, the evacuation entailed being bussed to an assisted care facility over 100 miles away in Wichita, Kansas [Winnie Fankhouser, 2009]. For many others, it consisted of staying with friends and family in the nearby towns of Haviland, Mullinville, and Pratt [Betty Osborne, 2009]. After three days, officials allowed Greensburg's residents back into their community to assess their losses [AP 2009]. Once back in Greensburg, residents found it challenging to navigate their community, because few recognizable landmarks remained.

Gene Reinecke, a local Greensburg resident [2009], recalls that one of the eeriest parts after the storm was the difficulty to orient herself in town. The only visible structure from all locations in town that one could orient themselves to was the grain elevator. Greensburg was so unrecognizable that a resident since 1961 was forced to count street intersections just to navigate her hometown. Most of the smaller, identifiable landmarks that she commonly used as navigational aids were missing or unrecognizable.

Prior to the storm, Janice Keller [2009] also used landmarks as reference points to negotiate her route through town. She provides a few examples of landmarks that stood out in her mind.

Figure 4.1 Destruction to Greensburg’s Cultural Landscape Caused by May 4, 2007, Tornado. Photo courtesy of Kansas Department of Transportation.



Janice [2009] commonly used Delmer Day Elementary/Middle School and Greensburg High School as visible landmarks. They were located on Main Street between the blocks of Iowa and Grant Avenue and at the corner of Main Street and Garfield Avenue respectively. After the tornado, the 277 students who were enrolled at Delmer Day Elementary/Middle School and the 97 students enrolled at Greensburg High School lost their schools [Dana Trummel, 2010]. The tornado severely damaged both schools rendering them unsafe and unusable (Figures 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Greensburg High School before and after May 4, 2007, tornado. Top photo courtesy of Cheryl Richard. Bottom photo courtesy of Greg Henshall.



Other landmarks Janice [2009] mentions were various houses situated throughout Greensburg. She explains that they acted as navigational aids while traversing her hometown. Houses made up a large part of Greensburg's cultural landscape prior to the tornado. The majority of the houses were ranch-style homes. The nearby appraiser in Pratt County explains that many of them were built between the 1930s and 1950s [DJ McMurry, 2010]. He adds that most of these houses were appraised to be worth between \$40,000.00 and \$50,000.00 [DJ McMurry, 2010].

Unfortunately for those, like Janice, who relied on houses as visible landmarks, most of Greensburg's houses did not ride out the powerful winds of the tornado unscathed. One elderly tornado survivor mentions, "Greensburg's neighborhoods looked worse than a war scene, because bombs usually left a building or two [Max Seacat, 2009]." Many local residents were unable to mentally process the destruction. One resident of 45 years, for instance, did not believe that the pile of rubble standing before her was the remains of her home [Aleta Sears, 2009]. Most of Greensburg's residential, cultural landscape was damaged beyond recognition.

The majority of houses in the affected area suffered shattered windows and the loss of exterior walls and roofs (Figure 4.3). Some houses were even swept off their foundation leaving only a concrete slab to act as a reminder of where they once stood. Debris filled the once well-groomed yards of most residences (Figure 4.4). The destruction caused by the tornado left many Greensburg residents homeless. Aid was desperately needed in Greensburg.

Figure 4.3 Max and Joleen Seacats' House Before and After May 4, 2007 Tornado.

Photos courtesy of house owners.



The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the governmental agency established to assist disaster stricken areas in the United States, answered Greensburg's cry for help. President Bush declared Greensburg a federal disaster the day after the tornado [KAKE-TV 2007]. Within 72 hours of the tornado, FEMA had already delivered many supplies to Greensburg [FEMA 2007]. Among them were 5 mobile home trailers along with the promise that 20 more mobile homes were in route (Figure 4.5). The mobile home trailers provided shelter for many Greensburg tornado victims who lost their houses in the storm. Once Greensburg's tornado survivors secured a roof over their

heads, they needed supplies to begin the clean-up process, but Greensburg’s commercial district was not open for business.

Figure 4.4 Franklin and Theda Rose's House Before and After May 4, 2007

Tornado. Photos courtesy of house owners.



Before the tornado, Greensburg’s commercial district met most of the basic needs of its residents. There were banks, retail stores, a few specialty shops, a theater, and city and governmental buildings. Among the stores that stood out in the minds of a few interviewees were Fleener’s Furniture, Twilight Theater, Hunter Drug Store and the public library [Mike Case, 2009; Harry Reinecke, 2009; Jeanie Kile, 2009].

Figure 4.5 FEMA mobile home trailers in Greensburg. Photo by author.



Jeanie Kile recalls that while working at Greensburg's public library she often walked across the street to enjoy a soda. Hunter Drug Store was the home to an old-fashioned soda fountain. A soda jerk by the name of Richard Huckriede, more commonly known by locals as Dick, served ice-cold fountain drinks to local patrons. He had worked at Hunter Drug Store since 1952 [Richard Huckriede, 2009]. Locals visited the soda fountain to purchase what they called a *Dickie drink* [Jan Case, 2009]. Dick's soda fountain inside Hunter Drug Store was an iconic place on Greensburg's Main Street. Unfortunately, like the majority of other businesses, it was flattened by the tornado.

Greensburg tornado survivor, John Rosenberger [2009], explains that the only multi-story building standing on Main Street after the tornado was his wife's former dress boutique, which also housed a bank on the ground level (Figure 4.6). According to John, Greensburg's former courthouse stood in the same location until it burned to the ground on March 17th, 1913. City officials at the time proposed building a new courthouse with

fewer combustible materials. As a result, the new building was constructed with reinforced concrete and brick. As an added benefit to being fire retardant, it was also stronger and more durable than most of the other buildings downtown. If it were not for this reinforced building and a few single-story buildings, all of Greensburg's commercial district would have been leveled by the tornado.

Figure 4.6 Only multi-story building standing after May 4, 2007, tornado. Top photo courtesy of Josh Dresslove. Bottom photo courtesy of G. Marc Benavidez



Going *Green*

The winds of change blew hard in the disaster-stricken Greensburg. Shortly after the devastating tornado, the community's civic leaders decided to rebuild Greensburg as an eco-friendly town. Moreover, they lead by example. All newly constructed city owned buildings were to be built to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum Certification, the highest award in sustainable building [Taylor Schmidt, 2009]. Essentially, Greensburg's leaders wanted their town to be a model community for eco-friendliness.

One of the main benefits to building *Green* is the reduced consumption of energy [Daniel Wallach, 2009]. Although the town's energy consumption would ultimately be reduced, Greensburg's leaders still wanted their power source to be environmentally friendly. The latest technologies in alternative energy would be used to generate power for the community. In fact, all of Greensburg's energy needs would be met by a series of wind turbines located just outside of town [Taylor Schmidt, 2009]. Even though Greensburg missed some past opportunities to embrace the latest economic or technological changes, its decision to go *Green* put the town on the forefront of the newest technology yet again.

Many local residents welcomed the idea of a *Green* community, however, it was not universally accepted. The decision to rebuild *Green* polarized residents. One faction embraced the idea of environmentally friendly building; where as, the other group strongly opposed it. Generally, the younger and middle-aged residents supported living *Green*, thus leaving a smaller footprint on the environment, and reducing their monthly

energy consumption. On the other hand, the older generations did not see the practicality in the added upfront costs of building *Green* and simply wanted their town rebuilt how it was before the disaster [John Rosenberger, 2009]. In other words, Greensburg's long-time residents put little stock in going *Green* and would rather stick to what they knew and understood.

For most of the elderly residents, the decision to rebuild was much more complicated than deciding whether to rebuild *Green* or not, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. Most importantly, the decision to rebuild Greensburg in an environmentally conscientious manner was officially made and supported by many of its residents. Scott Reinecke embraces the "New Greensburg" by saying, "If in 20 years something happens to our town again, we will miss the old *New Greensburg* [Scott Reinecke, 2009]." What Scott means is that residents refer to the rebuilding of Greensburg as the "New Greensburg" and everything before the disaster as the "Old Greensburg."

The *Green* initiative put Greensburg in the spotlight because until now no other community had decided to embrace an eco-friendly community design. Greensburg's City Administrator, Steve Hewitt, shares, "The world is waiting, and what we do will be seen by everybody. We're going to become the best community that America, not just Kansas, will have [Shattuck 2008]." As a result of Greensburg's decision to rebuild eco-friendly, the town was known around the country. Similar to how the town embraced the newest technology in the past, Greensburg was using the latest technology to put itself on the map.

It seemed everywhere one looked Greensburg was in the public eye. On several accounts, news of the town's progress and eco-friendly building methods made headlines

on national news networks and in newspapers, such as CNN, USA Today, The New York Times, and The Weather Channel. One of the television networks that followed Greensburg's *Green* rebuilding process the closest was an affiliate of the *Discovery Channel* called *Planet Green*. The network sent a film crew to Greensburg to film a *docu-series* to chronicle the *Green* rebuilding of Greensburg. Beyond headlines and a television series, Greensburg's decision to go *Green* put the town's name on the lips of many political figures.

Greensburg, Kansas, is now a name well known in the Oval Office. The tornado occurred during the presidential term of George W. Bush. President Bush traveled to Greensburg several times and on one visit, spoke at the local high school commencement ceremony and awarded Greensburg High School's seniors their diplomas [Gerstenzang 2008]. Furthermore, newly elected President Barack Obama demonstrated the government's continued support for Greensburg by inviting local mayor, Bob Dixson, to the presidential inauguration and to sit in the presidential box at a joint session of Congress [Shear 2009]. Doing something as unique as rebuilding an entire town to the highest standards of *Green* friendliness has caught the eye of many.

The progressive thinking of this little community has also captivated the attention of celebrities with no prior affiliation to Greensburg. For instance, actor and director, Leonardo DiCaprio expressed his interest in the functionality of an entirely *Green* community. He states, "Greensburg [is] an ideal Petri dish for an experiment in *Green* design [Shattuck 2008, 13]." Leonardo went on to assist *Planet Green* with their *docu-series* of Greensburg's rebuilding and donated a significant amount of money to aid the community with their rebuilding expenses [Nelson 2009]. In all, the decision to go

Green put Greensburg on the forefront of the latest technology. However, it had several radical impacts on its new, *Green*, cultural landscape.

Greensburg's *Green* Cultural Landscape

Along U.S. Highway 54 near Greensburg, no longer were billboard advertisements solely promoting the world's largest hand-dug well located in Greensburg. Instead, several billboards read, "Greensburg, KS Rebuilding...Stronger, Better, Greener." The effects of Greensburg's decision to go *Green* are visible on the highway leading to it but even more apparent on the town's cultural landscape.

Daniel Wallach moved from Denver, Colorado, to Greensburg after learning of its decision to rebuild environmentally conscientious. Upon arrival he founded a non-profit organization called *Greensburg GreenTown* with the intent of providing resources and support to those rebuilding *Green* [Shattuck 2008]. Dan feels that it would be a fantastic story if we could rebuild this entire community *Green*. With the name of the town in mind, it seemed natural [National Geographic Video 2008]. Wallach's organization contributed to bringing several *Green* structures into fruition on Greensburg's cultural landscape.

Outside the window of Greensburg Greentown's office stands an exhibit called Greensburg Cubed. Students from the College of Architecture, Planning, and Design at Kansas State University designed four 10-foot portable cubes intended to educate people about sustainable ways to meet basic daily living needs (Figure 4.7) [Wilke 2008]. The *Green Haus*, for example, demonstrates the use of everyday objects like glass bottles and shredded paper as alternative forms of insulation in buildings. Other cubes provide insight into sustainable ways of purifying water, recycling, and *Green* friendly building

practices. From Greensburg Cubed, three small wind turbines are visible one block south at the 5.4.7 Arts Center.

Figure 4.7 Cubes Demonstrating *Green-Friendly Practices*. Photo by author.



The 5.4.7 Art Center's name commemorates the EF-5 tornado that struck Greensburg on May 4th, 2007. Its building is the first to earn LEED Platinum Certification in the state of Kansas [Stacy Barnes, 2009]. LEED certification is based on a building's degree of sustainability by awarding points to several components. Among these are its development of a sustainable site, water and energy efficiency, material selection, indoor environmental quality, and its overall innovation/design [USGBC 2008]. Because of this environmental friendly emphasis for the building's design, its appearance does not resemble architecture typically found in western Kansas (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8 LEED Platinum 5.4.7 Arts Center in Greensburg, Kansas. Photo by author.



Covering the exterior of the buildings are panes of tempered glass, which abate the affects of UV rays on its reclaimed wood structure. The glass also maintains a cooler interior temperature during the searing summer months, which reduces the load on its three geothermal wells used for cooling and heating [Stacy Barnes, 2009]. Three wind turbines and solar panels on its roof sustain its energy needs. Its roof is called a *Green* roof, because plants in soil act as additional insulation. Rainwater is diverted into a 1500-gallon cistern, which is later used to water the property's native buffalo grass lawn. Greensburg's 5.4.7 Arts Center is one example of the *Green* initiative's affect on the cultural landscape, but even more can be found within the community.

Walking south from the arts center one sees a house like no other. Owned by Greensburg GreenTown, the silo eco-home is a house built with sustainability and strength in mind. It offers many similar environmentally friendly features found at the

arts center such as a geothermal well, solar panels, and a *Green* roof. However, in addition to its eco friendliness, it is designed to withstand the fury of a tornado.

The tallest structure left standing after the monster EF-5 tornado ripped through Greensburg was the grain elevator. For this reason, the cylindrical shape of the grain elevator inspired Armour Homes, a company based in Florida, to design a silo-shaped house (Figure 4.9) [Hooper 2009]. A public demonstration showcased the rigidity of the structure when a Ford Escort without an engine was hoisted 60 feet in the air and dropped on the house's roof with no resulting damage. Daniel Wallach, founder of Greensburg GreenTown, explains that the silo eco-home is essentially a giant safe room well suited for those living in Tornado Alley [Hooper 2009]. He intends to open the house as a bed and breakfast so that people can experience *Green* living. In the future, 11 more eco-home bed and breakfasts will be constructed. As for now, the silo eco-home is the first of many eco-homes on Greensburg's cultural landscape.

Figure 4.9 Silo Eco-Home Inspired by Local Grain Elevator. Photo by author.



Across town, another house uncharacteristic of rural Americana can be found on Greensburg's *Green* cultural landscape. Homeowners, Scott and Jill Eller, opted for a split geodesic dome house after losing their previous house in the May 4th, 2007, tornado (Figure 4.10). Not only are dome houses highly energy efficient and capable of enduring high winds, but they also require less time to construct than traditional building methods. Their dome house was constructed with structural insulated panels (SIPs) known for being strong, airtight, and good insulators. Like the silo-eco home and the Ellers' dome house, most houses in Greensburg are benefiting from modern building materials and methods, although not all appear as futuristic.

Figure 4.10 Split Geodesic Dome House Owned by Scott and Jill Eller. Photo courtesy of tvbarn.



In fact, many homes constructed post-disaster in Greensburg were built environmentally conscientious but still resembled ranch style homes commonly found throughout America. Most of these homeowners purchased homes that were more appropriately sized for their needs. Size is considered one of the most basic *Green* building practices [Daniel Wallach, 2009]. Several of these ranch style houses incorporated energy efficient building materials with one of the most common being insulated concrete forms (ICFs) used in forming walls (Figure 4.11). ICFs hold poured concrete during the curing process and remain afterwards providing additional insulation.

The sheer number of newly constructed homes may possibly be one of the greatest visible changes on the post-disaster residential cultural landscape. Widespread throughout Greensburg, new houses with new windows, siding, and roofs adorn the city blocks, which is quite different from the vast majority of older homes found before the tornado. Furthermore, they are worth considerably more than the old homes. According to Pratt County Appraiser, DJ McMurry, statistics on the value of houses are calculated over a three-year period. From the date of the tornado to September 2009, the lowest valued house was worth \$861.00, the highest was \$341,000.00, and the average was \$90,000.00. Overall, the value of homes has increased considerably since the tornado swept through town.

Interestingly, these new houses are visibly distinct. They vary in exterior color, design, and size unlike the uniformity often visible in many housing subdivisions where a comparable amount of new development typically occurs [Blake and Arreola 1996]. In all, highly energy efficient, well-insulated houses make up the majority of Greensburg's residential cultural landscape encouraged by the *Green* initiative.

Figure 4.11 ICFs used to form walls of Greensburg State Bank. Photo courtesy of Dea Anne Corns.



At the heart of the community and its *Green* cultural landscape is the new K-12 school, which is a consolidation of the K-8 and secondary school (Figure 4.12). Geographer Bill Wyckoff claims that nothing is more devastating to a local community than witnessing the closure of its school [Wyckoff 2002]. Therefore, I infer that nothing brings more pride and joy to a small community than building a state of the art school that fosters a healthy, diversified, technologically advanced learning environment for its youth. Not only will the new school offer an environmentally friendly learning space, but the rebuilding of its athletic facility was also constructed eco-friendly.

Figure 4.12 Greensburg's new, Green, school under construction. Top photo courtesy of Cheryl Richard. Bottom photo courtesy of USD 422 website.



Unlike most high school football fields in western Kansas, Greensburg's new football playing surface is artificial turf, not grass (Figure 4.13). Beneath the artificial turf, a drainage system captures rainfall that can be later used to water the school's grounds [Mike Case, 2009]. Even though Greensburg High School currently plays 8-man football, which requires a field of different dimensions than 11-man football, Greensburg's football field was constructed in a fashion that would allow it to be easily converted to a standard football field. This is one indication that Greensburg High School anticipates that its enrollment will increase in the future. In a time when many

schools in small towns in the Great Plains are decreasing in enrollment size and are facing consolidation, Greensburg High School is making preparations for their enrollment numbers to increase.

Local superintendent, Darin Headrick, expects the new school and facilities to be open for the 2010-2011 academic year [Anderson 2010]. According to local schoolteacher, Jan Case [2009], Greensburg's new school will likely be a model institution. It intends to offer programs for students and visiting educators to learn more about *Green* technologies. When the construction of the school is complete, the school not only plans to be a top-notch educational institution, but it also aspires to earn the highest sustainable building certification, LEED Platinum certified.

Figure 4.13 Greensburg High School football field. Photo by author.



Greensburg's *Green* commercial landscape hosts the most LEED Platinum certified buildings per capita out of any city in the U.S [Taylor Schmidt, 2009]. In fact,

several more are under construction. Among these buildings are Greensburg's City Hall, Kiowa County Hospital, 5.4.7 Arts Center, and BTI-Greensburg.

BTI Corporation, with locations in Greensburg, Bucklin, Ness City, and Pratt, is one of the largest John Deere dealerships in the country [Mike Estes, 2010]. BTI-Greensburg is a full service John Deere dealership that meets the needs of farmers across southwestern Kansas. John Deere Corporation named it a *Dealer of Tomorrow*, which they use to describe top-performing dealerships in the country and ones that will likely be the foundation of the company in the future [Mike Estes, 2010]. After the tornado, a store already known for its green colored tractors fully embraced Greensburg's *Green* initiative.

BTI-Greensburg was one of the first LEED Platinum certified businesses to rebuild after the storm. They built a new store with state of the art *Green* technology on the eastern edge of Greensburg on Highway 54. The John Deere dealership incorporated wind turbines, radiant heat in the shop floors, and used recycled tractor oil to power their heating system [BTI-Greensburg Presentation, 2009]. In addition to its tractor related services, the store also sells wind turbines. Although the dealership has changed much in outward appearance and has added new services, it did incorporate one part of its previous storefront.

One of the exterior brick walls of the pre-disaster store had a brick mural lain in it. It depicted a rural, agricultural setting with farmers working the land on tractors. According to Shawna Stegman, an employee at BTI-Greensburg, the store salvaged the mural from the debris of their destroyed store [Stegman, 2010]. The very art piece was later incorporated into a freestanding mural in front of the new, *Green* dealership (Figure

4.14). It is the only part of the LEED Platinum certified building that resembles the former dealership.

Figure 4.14 BTI-Greensburg John Deere dealership before and after May 4, 2007, tornado. Top photo courtesy of Shawna Stegman. Bottom photo courtesy of GreensburgGrows.com.



Another LEED Platinum building in Greensburg is the Business Incubator. The town of Greensburg built it to encourage economic activity following the disaster by providing start-up businesses and professionals a facility to operate. The Business Incubator provided an opportunity for tornado survivor, Scott Reinecke, to remain a business owner in Greensburg. Scott opened a business that specializes in artistic

creations made with broken glass recycled from the May 4th, 2007, tornado debris. He named his store Studio 54 because of its location on the corner of U.S. Highway 54 and Main Street.

Even Main Street itself was not overlooked in the *Green* initiative. Once an ordinary street where most of Greensburg's businesses were located, Main Street recently underwent a sustainable streetscape makeover. Along the sides of the street, aesthetic landscaping acts as an elaborate drainage system to absorb rainwater directly into the water table (Figure 4.15) [Mike Case, 2009]. During the construction of the streetscape, Main Street's business district was inaccessible. Furthermore, several delays pushed back the completion date. For these reasons, several businesses rebuilt on Highway 54 rather than returning to their previous location on Main Street.

Along Highway 54 in Greensburg, several businesses reopened in temporary trailers until their permanent building was completed. Among these businesses were primarily insurance companies and banks. One of the first businesses to open in its new permanent building was a *Kwik Shop*. Unlike most of these franchise stores that sell fuel and convenience store items, Greensburg's store also included a small *Dillons* grocery store owned by the Kroger Corporation. The store, referred to as *Kwillons* by locals, sold a limited selection of groceries until the permanent, adjoining store later opened on February 11th, 2009 [Kent Colwell, 2009].

Greensburg's *Kwillons* store offered more than fuel and groceries. Because the tornado destroyed all of Greensburg's restaurants, including the *Kansan Restaurant*, the *Kwillons* became the only place where people can purchase prepared meals. Although two years had passed since the tornado, no restaurant had reopened in town. Elderly

residents Harry and Gene Reinecke [2009] lament that deli sandwiches and fried chicken are no substitutes for a restaurant. They miss the convenience of being able to dine out after church on Sundays like they often did before the tornado [Harry and Gene Reinecke, 2009].

Figure 4.15 *Green* streetscape under construction after the May 4, 2007, tornado. Top photo courtesy of J. Schumacher. Bottom photo by author.



Before the tornado destroyed most of the town, Greensburg was home to nine Christian churches with the largest congregation being the First United Methodist Church [Steve Dawson, 2009]. According to Mitzi Hesser, an employee of the Kiowa County Health Department and long-time resident [2009], all but one of Greensburg's churches

were the first to rebuild. Before the different denominations secured a place to congregate, a non-denominational worship service took place in a centrally located tent [Mike Case, 2009]. Like the banks and insurance companies along Highway 54, many churches occupied temporary buildings until the construction of their permanent church was finished. A number of the churches rebuilt in a location different from where they were formerly located, including the First Baptist Church and the First United Methodist Church [John Harris, 2009]. In fact, even after three years, Greensburg's Southern Baptist Church still meets in a house rather than in a designated religious building [Dawson, Steve, 2009]. Overall, many of the rebuilt buildings in Greensburg, including the churches, were not constructed in their previous location.

The town of Greensburg has made tremendous strides since all was lost in the tornado three years ago. Nearly all of the tornado debris has been cleaned up and removed from town. The use of heavy machinery and vehicles damaged many streets in Greensburg leaving jarring potholes especially in the downtown area. Near downtown, a new apartment complex was recently completed. In addition to multi-family living residences, numerous neighborhoods are filled with newly built houses and well-manicured lawns. Although much progress has been made, there are some places on the landscape that remain neglected.

Absentee ownership is one of the primary reasons some places in Greensburg are a blight on the landscape [Steve Dawson, 2009]. Even after three years, large, gaping holes throughout town indicate where houses with basements once stood. Scattered throughout town are several damaged houses with boarded-up windows and unkept yards (Figure 4.16). Many of these houses sport signs reading, "For Sale By Owner."

Figure 4.16 Unkept, Damaged House in Greensburg. Photo by author.



In addition to damaged houses, some areas were abandoned after they were cleaned up and never rebuilt. For instance, an entire city block sits empty except for a concrete staircase leading to a house that no longer exists (Figure 4.17). Although absentee owners have prevented some parts of Greensburg from moving forward during its rebuilding process, only about one or two dozen of these derelict lots dot Greensburg's landscape.

Without question, Greensburg's *Green* cultural landscape hardly resembles the cultural landscape that existed before the EF-5 tornado struck on May 4th, 2007. Many applaud the community's resiliency for rebuilding environmentally conscientious,

Figure 4.17 Steps leading to a house that no longer exists. Photo by author.



including President Barack Obama. In his 2009 address to a joint session of Congress, he stated:

"I think about Greensburg, Kansas, a town that was completely destroyed by a tornado, but is being rebuilt by its residents as a global example of how clean energy can power an entire community – how it can bring jobs and businesses to a place where piles of bricks and rubble once lay. The tragedy was terrible, said one of the men who helped them rebuild. But the folks here know that it also provided an incredible opportunity" [Obama 2009].

Indeed an incredible opportunity presented itself to many residents of Greensburg. However, some, primarily the elderly, have not shared the same enthusiasm. Lost were the houses and town that held so many fond memories. Even though geographer Graham

Rowles provides insight into the elderly's place attachment, we still know little about how a modified cultural landscape impacts the elderly's deep-seated feelings of place attachment. In the subsequent chapter, I seek to explain how the May 4th, 2007, tornado affected the elderly's attachment to place in Greensburg, Kansas.

CHAPTER 5 - Elderly's Place Attachment to Greensburg, Kansas

“Greensburg was like a favorite pair of old jeans; it just fit right” [Scott Reinecke, 2009]. Scott Reinecke, who is now a business owner in the Business Incubator, reminisces about his boyhood adventures in his hometown. He recalls discovering many shortcuts around town, which often required cutting through yards and bushes. In doing so, “I knew every crack in the sidewalk and what lay around every corner,” as he put it [Scott Reinecke, 2009]. His fond memories of growing up in town, like most residents, continued to increase, as he grew older. His deep-seated feelings for Greensburg grew stronger over time. Scott acknowledges that deep in his heart Greensburg was always home.

Before the tornado, Greensburg was a place of attachment for many, especially its long-time, elderly residents. Many of them have lived in Greensburg for decades, if not their entire lives. Over the course of their lifetime, several places in the small town took on special meaning to those who call Greensburg home. In some ways, the town gave meaning to the elderly's lives.

Autobiographical Insideness

One can think of photo albums commonly found in homes as a visual autobiography of the significant events in one's life. Like these photo albums, the landscape of one's hometown can act as a visual reminder of significant events that

occurred there. Geographer Graham Rowles calls a town's ability to chronicle one's life an autobiographical insideness. Over time, places in and around one's hometown begin to possess multiple layers of personal meaning and reinforce places of attachment [Rowles 1990]. Through interviews with some of Greensburg's long-time residents, we gain a better understanding of how their hometown acted as an autobiography of their lives before the storm and how that changed afterwards.

What made Greensburg feel like home before the tornado? Like Scott Reinecke, my question took Kiowa County Commissioner and native Greensburg resident Gene West back to his childhood. Gene spent summers fishing in the nearby Thompson Creek and riding on the fender of a tractor with his beloved Grandfather [Gene West, 2009]. When the north winds brought cold weather and snow, Gene, along with lifelong classmates, went sledding *Western Kansas* style as he calls it. Even though this part of the state lacks hills typically associated with sledding, one can improvise with an old car hood and a four-wheel drive pickup. Gene and his friends, laughing and carrying-on, pulled each other and threw snowballs for hours on the country roads near their hometown. For Gene, Scott, and likely many other boys growing up in Greensburg, seeing places where their boyhood adventures took place in and around Greensburg reminded them of their childhood and contributed to their strong sense of place attachment. For others, Greensburg has felt like home for reasons other than childhood memories.

For Karen Dugger, a Greensburg resident since 1960, her memories of raising her family in Greensburg made the town feel like home [2009]. On bluebird days near the sparkling water's edge of a small lake in Greensburg, you probably would have found

Karen with her family skipping rocks. When looking at this particular lake, she sees more than is visually apparent. Karen explains that she sees a place where many wonderful memories were made with her children. The small lake in Greensburg served as a reminder of her time spent as a mother with young children and held a special place in Karen's heart.

Another Greensburg mother, Jan Case, also attributes the memories of raising a family in Greensburg to her deep-seated feelings of attachment. She mentions that many community members felt like extended family. In addition to a place's ability to remind one of a significant event, Jan explains that seeing certain people reminded her of memorable events in her life as well. For example, seeing Dick Huckriede, the soda jerk at Hunter Drugstore, brought back memories of when her husband took their son to have a milkshake after his first day of school many years ago [Jan Case, 2009]. Seeing Hunter Drugstore and Dick contributed to Jan's deep-seated feelings of attachment to Greensburg.

In all, the responses from Greensburg interviewees were as unique as the individuals themselves. However, some common threads existed in what they shared. Most of the interviewees mentioned seeing certain places stirred up fond memories. These special places were where significant events occurred in their life. As a result, they felt a strong feeling of place attachment to these places situated in their hometown of Greensburg.

Because the tornado rendered Greensburg's landscape unrecognizable, it could no longer visually remind people of anything that took place there. Ruth West, an 88-year-old tornado survivor, shares her experience with the modified landscape. Ruth feels like

she lost her past [2009]. Nothing reminds her of her identity or her life story. The places she had fond memories of have all disappeared.

Ruth goes on to explain that when she walks around Greensburg, she often experiences flashbacks of what her hometown use to look like. In other words, she sees beyond what is visually apparent. For example, she does not merely see an empty lot on Main Street, but rather the former location of where she met friends for a Coke [Ruth West, 2009]. A few blocks away she would arrive at the place where she attended church. Like Ruth West, many elderly residents and former residents of Greensburg felt that they lost their past. The tornado carried off many pages of the elderly's biography.

Possibly one of the most significant autobiographical places long-time residents lost was their house. Mitzi Hesser, a long-time resident [2009], explains that she lost more than a house; she lost her home. She explained that homes are filled with memories and love. The loss of such a meaningful place emotionally affected many tornado survivors.

When Max Seacat arrived at the empty lot where his home once stood, for instance, he was overtaken by emotions and wept [Max Seacat, 2009]. People's homes meant a great deal to them for what they symbolized, such as the place where they spent their married life or raised their children. Lorene Conklin's adult children never imagined that their parents would live anywhere else besides the house that they always knew as home [Lorene Conklin, 2009]. Those chapters of the elderly's biography have been torn out forever. For those who have decided to rebuild, new chapters in their autobiography are being written set in Greensburg.

The small town of Greensburg, Kansas, is centrally located for Betty Osborne's adult children. Its centrality makes it an ideal place for her family to gather on special occasions and holidays. For this reason, Betty rebuilt her home so that her children and grandchildren would have a place to stay when they visit [Betty Osborne, 2009]. Soon after the house was rebuilt, Betty and her family celebrated a birthday party with over 40 loved ones at her house. Because Betty rebuilt her home in Greensburg, a new chapter in her biography set in Greensburg was written and new feelings of place attachment were formed.

A new chapter was also written for Greensburg's beloved public school. However, the local Board of Education recently put a new spin on it, which upset many. On March 8th, 2010, the Board of Education (BOE) proposed a name, mascot, and school color change for the Greensburg school [Anderson 2010]. Even before the BOE met, some elderly Greensburg residents opposed the idea of changing the school name. The name was the basis for much of their identity.

Over coffee at McDonalds in Pratt, one former resident expressed that the ultimate blow to losing her past at Greensburg was the talk about Greensburg High School changing its name [Miley Rush, 2009]. As early as the summer of 2009, local residents feared that Greensburg High School would change its name to Kiowa County High School. Along with the name change, the community would lose their beloved Rangers mascot and their red and blue school colors. People understood that finances motivated the county to consolidate schools and to change the school's name, but losing their identity and something they were deeply attached to does not make it any easier to accept [Miley Rush, 2009].

At the BOE meeting held on March 8th, 2010, a sizeable crowd voiced their dissatisfaction with a recent decision made by the board. The changes came in conjunction with a recent two-year co-operative agreement with the soon-to-close Haviland High School located 11 miles away. One sentiment felt by the group of Greensburg townspeople was that after all the hard work the community invested into rebuilding a state-of-the-art school, they were being asked to give up a sense of identity [Anderson 2010]. Another attendee, M. T. Liggett, voiced, “You need to preserve your heritage. I wouldn’t change the name, colors, or the mascot [Anderson 2010, 1].” Because of the tornado, many current and former Greensburg residents lost features on the cultural landscape that reminded them of their heritage. It is likely that losing more of their heritage associated with a place of deep attachment motivates them to fight for keeping some things familiar.

Physical Insideness

A place of attachment is viewed fondly by one who shares an intimate bond with it. Often, the individual frequents these special places as often as possible. As a result of repeated visits, they develop a strong familiarity with these special places [Jackson 1996]. According to cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, familiarity with an appropriately sized place often contributes to feelings of place attachment [1974]. Another geographer, Graham Rowles, explains that physical insideness, or, in other words, a keen familiarity with one’s hometown is a key component of the elderly’s place attachment [Rowles 1990]. Some of Greensburg’s long-time residents shared which places were special to them before the town was devastated by the tornado on May 4th, 2007, and how those beloved places changed.

During my interviews with local residents I asked them what they miss most about the Greensburg they knew before the tornado?" I intended for this question to allow interviewees an opportunity to reflect on the places or things they missed most about Greensburg. I surmised these places mentioned were likely places of attachment before the tornado.

Helen Todd, a local Greensburg resident in her late 60s at the time of the storm [2009], misses the historic homes and buildings in Greensburg. She feels that even if Greensburg were to rebuild with traditional materials without a focus on *Green*, one could never recreate the character associated with its historic homes and buildings. Her husband, Art, admits that he would trade the new homes in Greensburg for the old ones in a minute [Art Todd, 2009]. Several interviewees mention that they miss the character associated with places in Greensburg. Among these places were Greensburg's water tower, Main Street storefronts, public library, theater, Hunter Drug Store, Greensburg High School, and the Kansan Restaurant [Mitzi Hesser, 2009; Jeanie Kile, 2009; Max Seacat, 2009; Gene West, 2009; Janet West, 2009].

Although not a specific place, several individuals express that they loved the trees scattered throughout their community that grew before the storm. Betty Osborne lost her house to the tornado, but found some comfort knowing that her trees and rose garden survived [Betty Osborne, 2009]. Homeowners invested a piece of themselves into their property when they planted trees on it. For many residents, the trees were symbolic of their growing sense of attachment.

Unfortunately for many trees, the tornado denuded most of their leaves and branches. In fact, the majority of trees in Greensburg were uprooted entirely. The

destruction to the trees emotionally impacted several Greensburg residents. For one tornado survivor, the sight of the mangled trees emotionally bothered her more than anything else related to the entire disaster [Karen Dugger, 2009]. I believe this signifies how strongly she was attached to Greensburg's trees. John Rosenberger, another Greensburg tornado survivor, shared a similar sentiment about the trees in Greensburg. John could not bear to look at his severely damaged trees after the storm [John Rosenberger, 2009]. Worse yet, he recognizes that he does not have enough time left in his life to grow new trees to replace the ones he lost. Besides lacking the required time to re-grow new trees, he also does not have an adequate amount of time to recreate an attachment to Greensburg that resembles the one he once experienced. Greensburg's appearance simply changed too significantly too late in John's life.

Change was ubiquitous throughout Greensburg. Like many small town communities, Greensburg townspeople knew nearly everyone in the community and where their house was located prior to the tornado [Art Todd, 2009]. Carl Conklin, a Greensburg resident of 40 years [2009], became misty eyed when he mentioned that he no longer knew where everyone lived in town unless they displayed a sign in front of their house identifying the residents (Figure 5.1). A local organization intended for these nametag signs to raise money and to express local pride in rebuilding *Green*. However, as Carl points out, they also indicated where individuals rebuilt their houses in his hometown that he no longer knew exceedingly well.

Art Todd, who is 73 years old, wishes that vehicles in Greensburg sported similar nametag signs. The massive EF-5 tornado heaved cars through the air like they were children's toys leaving most of them totaled by the insurance company. As a result, most

people in Greensburg purchased new vehicles to replace their severely damaged cars. Frequently, their new vehicles were different in make and model from their previous vehicle. Art explains his frustrations of no longer being able to recognize his fellow community members by their cars so that he could wave to them [Art Todd, 2009]. The tornado simply made everything that was once familiar to Greensburg's long-time residents drastically unfamiliar.

Figure 5.1 Signs placed in front of houses and businesses. Photo by author.



New easements and zoning regulations established by city officials prevented several Greensburg residents from rebuilding their houses where they were located before the storm. Some of the easement modifications created little visible change. Elma Helwig, for instance, had to purchase an additional lot in order to have adequate space to rebuild her house and garage. Other regulations were more drastic and contributed to the town being unfamiliar to many long-time residents [Elma Helwig, 2009]. After the

storm, a few residential neighborhoods in Greensburg were re-zoned commercial, which prevented former residents from rebuilding their houses in the same location [Miley Rush, 2009]. In a community comprised primarily of elderly residents, many did not look favorably upon these changes.

No Familiar Place to Call Home

The elderly long-time residents of Greensburg were forced to make one of the most difficult decisions in their lives. Do they rebuild their houses and lives in Greensburg or move elsewhere? Interestingly, the New Greensburg was just as unfamiliar to them as a town that they had never visited because of the destruction caused by the tornado. Moreover, restrictions and new regulations dictated how and where residents could rebuild a house. One elderly resident, John Rosenberger [2009], expresses his frustration, “They’re not making it *Green*; they’re building it totally unusable.” In the 76 years John has lived in Greensburg, he never recalls the town enforcing such strict zoning regulations nor so much change at one time. John explains that the main reason his wife and he moved away from Greensburg after the tornado was the new, strict regulations.

Like John Rosenberger, hundreds of elderly, tornado survivors faced the same decision of whether to rebuild their house in Greensburg, or, to move away from their dear town and friends. If they chose to stay and rebuild their house in the devastated community, they would also have to accept living in a town with little or no infrastructure for an undisclosed amount of time. Local tornado survivors, Karen and Wayne Dugger, remained in their damaged house for two months without utilities with the intent of rebuilding their home and lives in Greensburg [Wayne Dugger, 2009]. The willingness

to drive for a hot shower, to walk to a port-a-potty, and to live by candlelight exemplifies the hardships they willingly faced to remain in their beloved community. However, after two months and little visible progress in town, the Duggers decided to move away.

Others, like Dean and Gloria Belcher, felt progress in town did not come quickly enough, so they thought moving away would be a more appealing option than living in a FEMA trailer [Gloria Belcher, 2009]. Both the Duggers and Belchers agreed that their age was not the sole, determining factor in moving away. However, one can imagine how these obstacles to rebuilding would be compounded for someone in their advanced years.

Even though many elderly tornado survivors felt it was in their best interest to move away from Greensburg, their feelings of strong attachment to the community were not severed but rather fondly remembered. It is still common for former residents to reminisce about the “Old Greensburg,” but sadly, they return to reality knowing it is no longer the same place. Former Greensburg resident, Warren Sturgeon [2009], feels like he is in a different town when he visits Greensburg. Beyond its changes in physical appearance, many local businesses and residents rebuilt in new locations leaving the town unfamiliar even to long-time residents. Unfortunately, for many displaced residents, they feel homeless in the sense that neither Greensburg nor their new place of residence feels familiar.

Several displaced Greensburg residents mentioned that their new communities were not familiar or home-like. Even after living in Pratt for three years, it still feels wrong for Karen Dugger to turn towards Pratt rather than Greensburg, when driving “home” after visiting family in nearby Haviiland, Kansas [Karen Dugger, 2009].

Unfortunately for former Greensburg resident, Dick Huckriede, he chose to quit driving after moving to Pratt [Dick Huckriede, 2009]. Pratt has a larger population and more traffic. Most significantly, he lacks the elevated familiarity with Pratt like he did with the pre-disaster Greensburg, where he felt comfortable with his driving abilities.

Another former resident of Greensburg explains that he still misses the familiarity of Greensburg, although the town of Pratt was becoming more familiar. He still does not possess the same level of comfort in his new house as did with his house in Greensburg. [Warren Sturgeon, 2009]. He explains that it feels like living in a hotel. Warren's point is that, the town of Pratt as a whole was becoming more familiar and home-like, but his actual house felt as unfamiliar as a hotel room.

Some Pratt residents sought to make their new houses more familiar by incorporating pieces of their beloved homes in Greensburg into their new homes in Pratt. Bill and Helen Savely, for instance, retrieved a horseshoe from their damaged house in Greensburg. Bill explains that the horseshoe was not a special keepsake. In fact, it was not even displayed in their Greensburg home. However, now it hangs on an exterior wall of their garage and serves as a reminder of the "Old Greensburg [Bill Savely, 2009]." Their act of bringing a memento from their house in Greensburg suggests that Greensburg still holds a special place in their heart, even though they moved away.

In a time of great change following the natural disaster, many displaced Greensburg residents reached out for anything familiar. Often times it resembled a memento they brought with them from Greensburg. However, it also came in the shape of visits to Greensburg. Possibly one of the most fortunate tornado survivors was John Rosenberger. Sadly for John, the tornado struck his farm destroying everything in its

path and leaving only the step of his farmhouse. On his property, he had a machine shed where he spent many hours working before the storm. Fortunately, he found many of the same tools he had once stored in the shed. After a short time, he rebuilt his shed to the exact specification it was before the storm on the very foundation. When John enters his shed, it is like traveling back in time for him. Everything is familiar and it feels like home. At times, he forgets that the outside world has changed so much [John Rosenberger, 2009]. Immediately after the storm, he used to travel to the shed as many as four times a week, but now goes about twice per week.

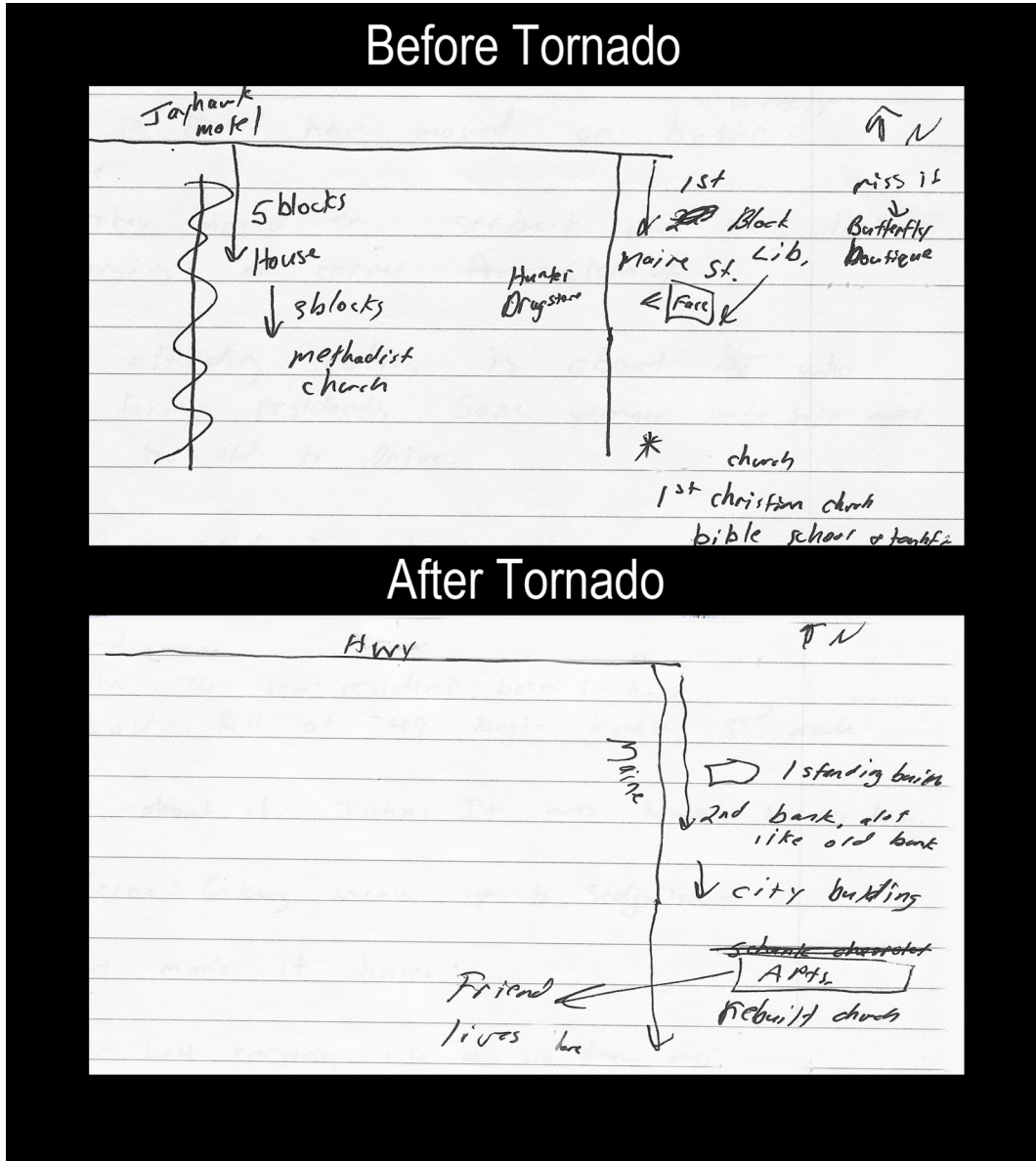
Current and Former Resident's Familiarity with Greensburg

For the most part, the frequency of visits made by former elderly Greensburg residents has decreased. As a result, they no longer exhibit the same degree of familiarity. As explained in the literature, familiarity is a crucial element in the developing and maintaining of one's place attachment [Tuan, 1974; Jackson, 1996]. A simple, mental map exercise was administered to exemplify the change in familiarity of former, long-time residents.

Former residents Jeanie Kile, and Franklin and Theda Rose and one current resident, Mike Case, each drew two maps for me. The purpose of the first map was to illustrate which places they frequented in Greensburg before the tornado. The second map shows their familiarity with the modified, rebuilt landscape in Greensburg. The pre-disaster maps show relatively more places than are drawn in their respective post-disaster maps. However, because the former residents had spent much less time in the "New" Greensburg, they lacked the detail visible in the current resident's post-disaster map.

Jeanie Kile's "before" map shows the places that she was most familiar with in Greensburg before the storm (Figure 5.2). These places primarily were located near her house and place of employment at the library. After the tornado, Jeanie and her husband moved to Pratt, Kansas. They returned weekly to attend church. At times, she also visited one of her long-time friends who relocated to the newly constructed apartments near Main Street. Jeanie's post-disaster map illustrates her lack of familiarity with Greensburg beyond the places she passed on the way to church or her friend's house.

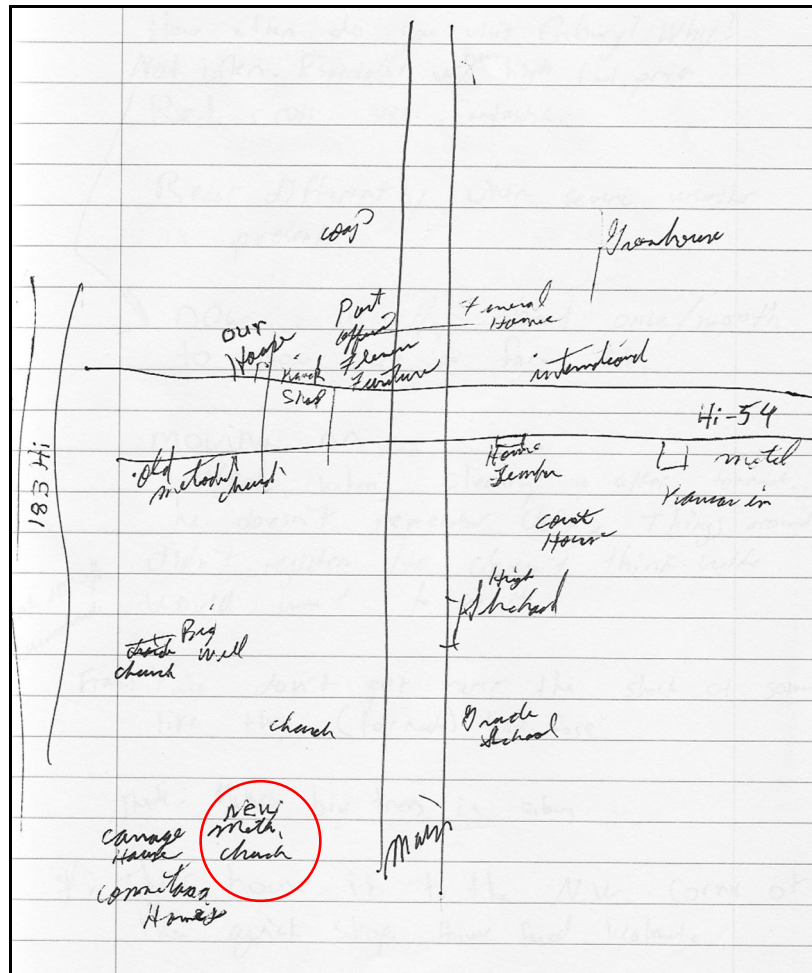
Figure 5.2 Maps drawn by former Greensburg Resident Jeanie Kile.



Like Jeanie Kile, Franklin and Theda Rose permanently relocated to Pratt, Kansas, after the tornado. They too return to Greensburg weekly to attend church [Theda Rose, 2009]. Franklin explains that the church they have attended for many years faces many obstacles in rebuilding and he felt compelled to stick by his church [Franklin Rose, 2009]. The Roses chose to combine their pre- and post-disaster maps. Almost all of the

landmarks on their map show the location of places before the tornado. Only the location of where their church rebuilt is identified on their map (Figure 5.3).

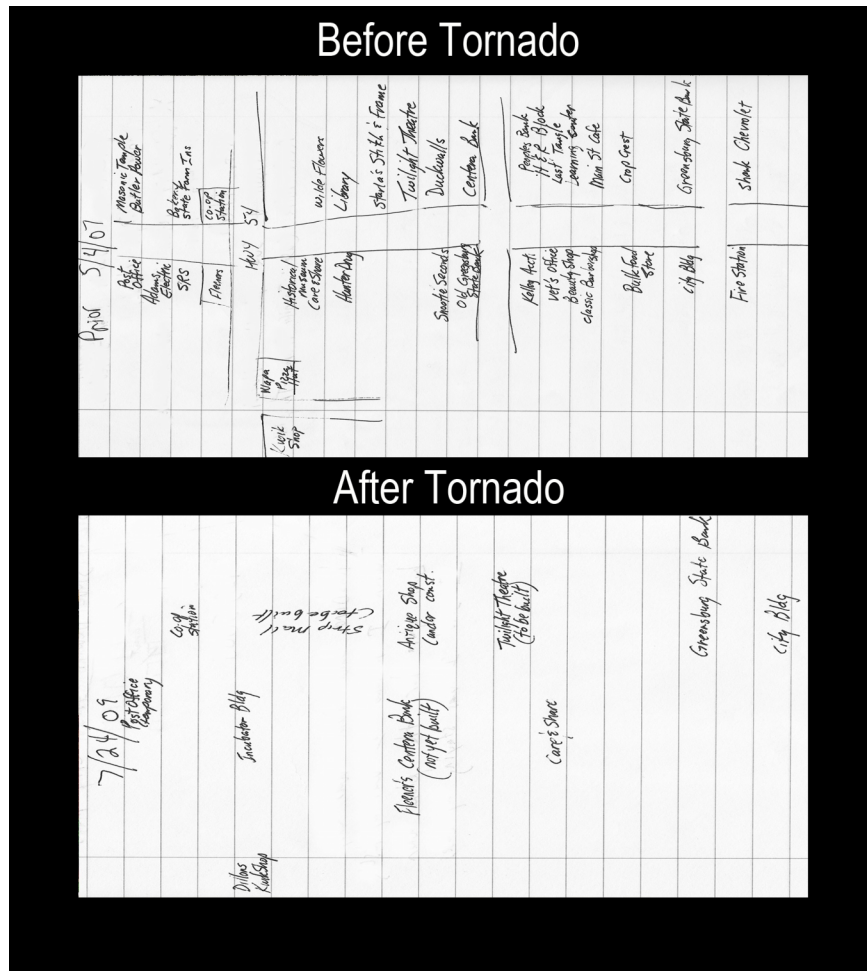
Figure 5.3 Map drawn by former residents Franklin and Theda Rose.



Current Greensburg resident Mike Case focused his before and after maps on Main Street. Mike's map of Greensburg's commercial district before the tornado indicates that he has a vast, spatial knowledge of where several businesses were located (Figure 5.4). Because he stayed in Greensburg after the tornado, the level of detail in his post-disaster map suggests that he is more familiar with Greensburg than former resident Jeanie Kile. Not only does Mike's post-disaster map show the location of places and

landmarks on and off of Main Street, but it also shows the location of temporary businesses, businesses under construction, and the future sites of businesses yet to arrive.

Figure 5.4 Maps drawn by current Greensburg resident Mike Case.



Overall, Greensburg’s long-time residents no longer possess the same level of heightened familiarity with their hometown. In addition to the devastation caused by the tornado, the rebuilt cultural landscape no longer resembles what the elderly once knew so intimately. Because it has been considerably modified, neither current nor former elderly, Greensburg residents possess the same degree of familiarity with the town, which

is indispensable to attachment to place. As a result, the physical insiderness of both current and former elderly residents has been significantly weakened. As the map exercise suggests, the elderly residents who chose to remain in Greensburg exhibit a stronger familiarity with the “New” Greensburg. For this reason, they experience a stronger place attachment to Greensburg than former residents. We can assume that former residents’ familiarity, like Jeanie Kile’s, is based on their limited visits to Greensburg, such as to visit friends or to attend church.

Social Insiderness

Before the tornado, a social component also contributed to the elderly’s strong feelings of place attachment to Greensburg. Geographer Graham Rowles recognizes this component as a social insiderness many elderly, long-time residents feel [Rowles 1990]. Psychologists Setha Low and Irwin Altman claim that relationships with community members are the most influential factor in forming place attachments [Low and Altman 1992]. Several elderly residents of Greensburg provide representative examples of the social interaction among residents both before and after the tornado.

Ruth West, born in 1920, explains that before the May 4th, 2007, tornado, a typical day for elderly and long-time Greensburg residents usually involved a routine filled with socializing [Ruth West, 2009]. Enjoying morning coffee with friends at the Kansan Restaurant was one 73-year-old man’s social life during the week [Art Todd, 2009]. The restaurant set aside a table so that local residents could socialize about such things as farming and local news and events [Art Todd, 2009; Gene West, 2009]. Others went to the local farming co-operative for their morning coffee and conversation.

Regardless of the location, the act of socializing was a top priority for Greensburg's elderly population.

After morning coffee, people continued with their daily routines. Many enjoyed the company of friends over a game of dominoes, Bridge, or other card games [Bill Keller, 2009; Jolene Seacat, 2009; Max Seacat, 2009; Ruth West, 2009]. Some even attended organized card-playing clubs, such as the *Dirty Dozen Card Club*, which was established nearly 40 years ago [Helen Todd, 2009]. Quality time spent with dear friends and loved ones contributed to feelings of deep attachment among elderly Greensburg residents.

Interviewees also mention Greensburg school functions as places that they commonly socialized with others. Although few elderly residents were as actively involved with the students as Harry Reinecke, a woodworking teacher's assistant, and Bill Savely, a school bus driver, the majority of Greensburg's long-time residents still supported the local youth [Harry Reinecke; Bill Savely, 2009]. On a brisk, fall, Friday night, for instance, Greensburg Rangers fans decked out in their red and blue school colors packed the Greensburg High School football stadium to support the community's high school football team. School activities such as athletic events, concerts, and theatrical productions provided ample opportunities for Greensburg's elderly population to interact with close friends and family and feel connected to the community.

An individual's church family might have been the dearest relationships the elderly shared with community members outside their immediate kin. Nearly all interviewees religiously attended Sunday worship services. Sunday mornings were a time for fellowship with fellow believers and an opportunity for bonds to strengthen to

friends and Greensburg. Not only did many attend Sunday worship services, but they also participated in additional church functions, including bell choir practices, Sunday school, and church pot-luck dinners [Mike Case, 2009; Max Seacat, 2009]. All of these gatherings fostered an environment to cultivate friendships. In turn, this helped reinforce their feelings of attachment to the town.

Immediately following the storm, many of Greensburg's elderly residents moved to Pratt because of the obstacles of living in Greensburg [Winnie Fankhouser, 2009]. Unfortunately for the elderly who remained in Greensburg, many of their friends move away. Helen Todd, 67, admits that her social life in Greensburg evaporated after the tornado [Helen Todd, 2009]. Since the storm, *The Dirty Dozen* has not functioned as well. Many new faces replaced the long-time card players, which changed the social dynamics of the club. Helen further explains that having her friends relocate away from Greensburg was the biggest drawback to living in Greensburg after the tornado. This suggests how important social relationships are in one's life as well as their significance in attachment to place.

After the May 4th tornado, many Greensburg residents who had previously been little more than acquaintances quickly became good friends. It was the shared experiences of the natural disaster that brought people closer together [Janet West, 2009]. For instance, most of the residents in town lost their home, lost people they knew, and faced insurmountable challenges to rebuilding their town and lives. No one can know what it feels like to experience all of these challenges, unless they were part of the affected group [Mitzi Hesser, 2009]. Maybe the most significant shared experience was living in *FEMA-ville*.

On the outskirts of Greensburg, FEMA placed a series of long, uniform rows of white, mobile home trailers. Locals soon coined the name *FEMA-ville* to refer to the new, makeshift neighborhood [Mike Case, 2009]. Not only did residents in *FEMA-ville* live near and interact with people they typically did not associate with before the storm, but they also shared a unique experience that only fellow *FEMA-ville* residents could fully relate to. For these reasons, many of the residents became dear friends, as a result of their shared experiences. In addition their similar living experiences, a limited amount of places to gather influenced social interaction and a new social insiderness.

During the early rebuilding stages of Greensburg, much of the social dynamics changed. Because the tornado changed many elderly people's routines, such as when and where they shopped, drank coffee, went for a drink at Hunter Drugstore, the elderly interacted with people not commonly part of their daily schedules [Ruth West, 2009]. In addition to changed routines, fewer places existed in town for them to gather. For instance, Harry and Gene Reinecke [2009] express their frustrations that no former or new restaurants have opened in Greensburg since the tornado. Because there are fewer places to congregate, many elderly people were brought together in commonly overlooked settings [Janet West, 2009].

The Greensburg Post Office became one of the serendipitous settings for socialization. The majority of people in Greensburg no longer had standing houses suitable for mail delivery. Therefore, everyone retrieved their mail from the local Post Office. Although a few miss their mail being delivered, picking it up at the Post Office provided a daily, forced, social interaction with other tornado survivors [Winnie Fankhouser; Gene Reinecke, 2009]. In fact, many viewed picking up their mail as an

event to look forward to in their day. While retrieving their mail, local residents chatted about the progress of the town, or the status of the building of their new homes.

Greensburg's Post Office provided a place for people to socialize with others in passing until something more suitable for visiting opened.

Jennifer Truman, a therapist specializing in trauma therapy from Hutchinson, Kansas, answered local Greensburg residents' call for an appropriate place to socialize. The Iroquois Center for Human Development, located in Greensburg, advertised for a trauma therapist willing to offer services to tornado survivors in Greensburg [Linda Young, 2009]. They selected Jennifer Truman because of her previous experience with Hurricane Katrina disaster victims. She recognized that many would be reluctant to accept her services if she advertised them as therapy. With that in mind, Jennifer polled the community to better understand what they wanted or needed. Their answer was simple. They wanted or maybe even needed a place to have coffee, because still no place existed to simply drink coffee and socialize.

The Iroquois Center for Human Development converted space in their maintenance shed into a makeshift coffee house (Figure 5.5). Jennifer initially advertised the coffee house with potluck dinners. The first few days it was open only about four or five people attended. Slowly, more and more people heard about the new coffee house, and the numbers of people attending increased. Jennifer estimates about 35 men and women attended at its peak [Jennifer Truman, 2009].

According to Jennifer, she conducted therapy as a process. Jennifer explains that life and recovery is a process for tornado survivors and she was there to help them move forward. Most of the therapy was administered in a group setting, although at times she

worked one-on-one with individuals. Jennifer explains that it is very common for people to be emotional for an extended period of time after a traumatic event [Jennifer Truman, 2009]. In fact, it could last forever for some individuals.

Figure 5.5 Coffee House in Iroquois Center for Human Development Maintenance Shed. Photo by author.



Various stimuli, such as loud noises, dark clouds, photographs, reaching for something lost in the storm, can all trigger emotions associated with their traumatic event preventing them from moving on with life. Even after three years, one tornado survivor and former resident still cannot talk about Greensburg, see photos of the devastation, or drive through the community without commenting that all the buildings should have been rebuilt in their former locations [Gloria Belcher, 2009]. Jennifer goes on to explain that people cope differently with traumatic events and move on at different rates. However, in order to truly move on, one must go through Kübler-Ross's seven stages of grief, which she explains begins with shock and ends with acceptance. Even though the town

was destroyed, Greensburg residents still had each other, which she thinks provided the necessary support to transition through each stage of grief [Jennifer Truman, 2009]. Jennifer feared that many people uprooted immediately after the tornado never went through all of Kübler-Ross's stages of grief. However, many sought *McTherapy* at the McDonalds restaurant in Pratt, Kansas.

The fall after the tornado, former Greensburg residents Bill Savely and Darrell Ary met for coffee at the Pratt McDonalds. As a result, a new routine began with some of the old, familiar faces of Greensburg. Not only did word spread throughout Pratt, but displaced Greensburg residents in other places such as Hutchinson, Wichita, Haviland, and Mullinville heard about the coffee hour and make up to a two hour commute each way whenever possible. Every Monday through Saturday, from 10:00 AM until 11:00 AM, roughly a dozen former residents of Greensburg meet to enjoy a cup of coffee and socialize (Figure 5.6).

Soon after the tornado, McDonald's coffee hour provided more therapy than small-talk. For the first seven months after the tornado, most attendees of the coffee hour shed countless tears [Jeanie Kile, 2009]. Conversations always went back to the way things used to be in Greensburg before the tornado disrupted their lives. Occasionally, some of the coffee drinkers brought items from the "Old Greensburg" and they chatted about them for the entire hour [Jeanie Kile, 2009]. Simply talking about how each person coped with the trauma helped the group emotionally. Helen Savely claims that the coffee hour was emotional therapy for everyone and conversing with people who experienced similar trauma and obstacles helped everyone to move on with their lives [Helen Savely, 2009].

Figure 5.6 Former Greensburg residents at Pratt, Kansas, McDonalds. Photo by author.



Summary

Regardless of whether tornado survivors rebuilt in Greensburg or moved to another community, they all experienced similar changes in their place attachment to Greensburg. Maybe the most notable was the change in their social lives. Many sought refuge and healing in the company of previous Greensburg acquaintances who often later became close friends because of the shared healing process. After three years, most have emotionally moved on and have accepted the changes in their lives. One tornado survivor, Bill Savely [2009], comments, “It’s a whole new way of life, and we’re too old to get use to it.” I think Bill is suggesting that even though most tornado survivors have some normalcy back in their lives, he, like others, will never feel a similar place

attachment like he did to the “Old Greensburg” with all of its familiar faces and places that reminded him of all the memorable times in his life.

CHAPTER 6 - Conclusions

Throughout much of Greensburg, Kansas's history, civic leaders have been progressive, forward-thinking individuals. Each time they embraced the newest mode of transportation or technology the community prospered and grew in population size. Attracting a stagecoach line to pass through town initially put Greensburg on the map. As transportation technologies changed, Greensburg adapted to the latest mode of transportation and thrived.

When the railroad arrived to western Kansas, the people of Greensburg understood the importance of accommodating it. For instance, when the railroad company asked the people of Greensburg to supply their locomotives with water, they met the need and even went beyond what was required. Greensburg townspeople constructed a well that remains the largest hand-dug well in the world. In more recent decades, Greensburg embraced highways by providing services to motorists and travelers. Most recently the town has adopted *Green* technology. The town of Greensburg always seems to find itself on the forefront of the latest technological advancement.

The decision for Greensburg to go *Green* came after an EF-5 tornado destroyed over 95% of the town on May 4th, 2007 [Graham 2009]. Although incorporating eco-friendly building and design practices into construction projects is not unprecedented, the people of Greensburg have more fully embraced it than most. Local city administrator, Steve Hewitt, pledged to be the *Greenest* and best community in the U.S. [Shattuck

2008]. Much can be learned from this model community in regards to how a town responds to rebuilding *Green* after a disaster. Of particular interest is how the elderly population's emotional connection, or, in other words, place attachment to the town, has been affected.

Place attachment is the bond that a person forms with a location [Low and Altman 1992]. In order for it to develop, an individual must possess a heightened familiarity of an appropriately sized place [Tuan 1974]. Repeated visits and shared experiences strengthen one's emotional connection to a place [Nostrand 1993; Jackson 1996]. From geographer Richard Nostrand's work on homelands, we have gathered that time spent in a place contributes to one's feelings of attachment.

As an individual spends more and more time in a place, their emotional connection intensifies [Nostrand 1993]. People often spend a considerable amount of time in their hometowns. As a result, their communities tend to find a special place in their hearts. It is a fusion of elements that leads people to feel the strongest sense of attachment to towns where they reside. Among the elements that contribute to their elevated meaning are familiar places, one's shared experiences set in and around their hometown, and an individual's relationships shared with local friends, family, and fellow community members [Fauntleroy 1997].

Psychologists Setha Low and Irwin Altman believe that social relationships are quite important in attachment to place. In fact, they assert that forming relationships with fellow residents is the most significant component in developing an emotional connection with a place [Low and Altman 1992]. Out of all the elements that scholars have associated with creating a bond with a place, such as familiarity with an appropriately

sized locale, repeated visits to a place, and attachment duration, relationships with other locals trump all of them. Relationships also play a role in place attachment in the lives of the elderly.

According to geographer Graham Rowles [1990], the elderly's place attachment is comprised of three forms of *insideness*: autobiographical, physical, and social. The cultural landscape's ability to remind people of their life story is thought of as an autobiographical insideness. Through a physical connection, many elderly prolong their independence even though their senses may be failing. Rowles refers to this as physical insideness. Relationships with fellow community members constitute the elderly's social insideness. What if all of the elderly's insideness components changed? How would alterations to all three of these *insideness* components affect the elderly's feelings of place attachment?

The purpose of this thesis is to better understand how the May 4th, 2007, tornado affected the elderly's emotional connection to Greensburg. I approached this study by way of three research questions. First, how did the tornado on May 4th, 2007, affect Greensburg's cultural landscape? Second, how has Greensburg's cultural landscape been affected by the initiative to build *Green*? Last, in what ways have the elderly population's emotional attachment to Greensburg been affected by the modified cultural landscape? After sharing how Greensburg's modified cultural landscape has changed, I discuss my findings about the change the elderly experienced with their emotional attachment to Greensburg. The latter is organized to coincide with geographer Graham Rowles's notion of an autobiographical, physical, and social *insideness*.

On May 4th, 2007, a massive tornado swept through Greensburg, Kansas, obliterating 95% of its cultural landscape [Graham 2009]. The powerful winds of the tornado destroyed nearly everything in its path. Trees were denuded of their leaves and branches. Greensburg's water tower lay in twisted heaps of metal with the words "Big Well" crinkled like a piece of paper. In fact, few things escaped the fury of the tornado, but among them were the grain elevator and few houses located on the eastern part of town.

The majority of Greensburg's residential neighborhoods suffered total damage. Most of the houses did not ride out the powerful winds of the tornado. One elderly tornado survivor mentions, "Greensburg's neighborhoods looked worse than a war scene, because bombs usually left a building or two" [Max Seacat, 2009]. Windows were shattered and some houses looked like dollhouses with their roofs and exterior walls removed. Some laid in piles of rubble while others were swept off their foundation entirely. Most of Greensburg's residential, cultural landscape was damaged beyond recognition.

Greensburg's commercial district also suffered nearly complete devastation. Only one multi-story building remained standing on Main Street after the tornado passed. This particular building was constructed with reinforced concrete and brick making it considerably more rigid than the other surrounding buildings. For this reason, it was likely able to endure the destructive winds [John Rosenberger, 2009]. A few single-story buildings stood with their exterior walls caving in on themselves. Much of Greensburg's commercial district on Main Street was simply gone. If it were not for the one reinforced

multi-story building and a few single-story buildings, all of Greensburg's commercial district would have been leveled by the tornado.

Greensburg's decision to embrace *Green* technologies had profound impacts on its cultural landscape. A split geodesic dome house, an eco-home inspired by the design of the town's grain elevator, and houses utilizing solar panels and other forms of alternative energy are all present on the new *Green* landscape where traditional ranch houses constructed in the 1940s and 1950s once stood. Not all houses constructed to be environmentally conscientious in Greensburg appear ultra-modern. Many residents constructed ranch-style homes utilizing the latest forms of insulation and high efficiency appliances and climate control systems. Most of these new houses are visibly distinct. They vary in exterior color, design, and size unlike the uniformity often visible in many housing subdivisions where a comparable amount of new development typically occurs [Blake and Arreola 1996]. In all, highly energy efficient, well-insulated houses make up the majority of Greensburg's residential cultural landscape encouraged by the *Green* initiative.

Examples of *Green* impacts on the landscape were also visible in the non-residential blocks of the community. Instances of wind turbines, solar cells, geothermal wells, and *Green* building practices were visible with many commercial and governmental buildings in Greensburg. All of Greensburg's newly constructed city-owned buildings were constructed to the highest degree of eco-friendly building practices known as LEED Platinum certified. Some businesses achieved this level too, such as the BTI-Greensburg John Deere Dealership and the Business Incubator. Although many

businesses did not embrace environmentally friendly building to the same degree as these two businesses, several did incorporate *Green* friendly practices.

Because Greensburg's modified cultural landscape appears drastically different from its pre-disaster state, the autobiographical insideness experienced by most of the town's elderly residents has been greatly impacted. Places around town that once held several layers of meaning to various elderly residents no longer acted as mnemonic devices. The places that were dear to Greensburg's elderly and reminded them of past significant events were gone. One elderly woman of 88 years, for instance, laments that she lost her past [Ruth West, 2009]. No place in town reminds her of all the years Greensburg has been her hometown. Chapters of the elderly's lives were projected on Greensburg's cultural landscape throughout their years as residents and then suddenly torn out by a devastating tornado. As a result, the elderly's feelings of physical insideness were destroyed resulting in an overall weaker bond with the town.

The elderly who returned and rebuilt their lives in Greensburg have decided to begin new chapters in their life story. As the town progresses through its rebuilding process, new places are taking on meaning to the elderly. The places that the majority of elderly residents noted as most significant include their rebuilt homes and the new school still under construction. Although several pages were removed from the elderly's autobiography, those willing to rebuild have the opportunity to continue their life story in their beloved hometown of Greensburg thus developing a new attachment.

The modified cultural landscape also affected the elderly's familiarity with the town referred to as a physical insideness by Rowles. After the disaster, Greensburg had changed so significantly that residents felt compelled to coin terms to distinguish between

Greensburg before and after the tornado. The term “Old Greensburg” was used to refer to the town pre-disaster and “New Greensburg” signified everything post-disaster. The tornado and more recently the decision to rebuild *Green* made the “New Greensburg” unfamiliar to long-time residents.

Before the storm, the elderly exhibited a heightened familiarity of their hometown, which contributed to their feelings of attachment. For example, most of the residents in town knew the location of where most everyone lived. After the tornado, however, many residents rebuilt somewhere other than in their previous location. Some of the residents relocated by choice, but in other cases new zoning regulations prohibited people from rebuilding where their house had once stood. Overall, dramatic changes to the once familiar landscape made many long-time residents feel lost without any place attachment to Greensburg.

Even the elderly who moved away from Greensburg felt lost in their new town’s unfamiliar surroundings. They hoped reaching out to something familiar from their previous hometown would make their new place of residence more appealing. Some former residents brought a memento from Greensburg to display in their new house. The act of bring a part of their previous residence along with them would suggest that they still felt an emotional connection to Greensburg. It appears that their act of moving away from Greensburg did not represent the cutting of all emotional ties to the town. Instead, these elderly, former residents simply made the decision that they felt was most appropriate for their present situation.

After the storm passed, the evacuation of all Greensburg’s tornado survivors put into motion a change in social insiderness for the elderly. Many elderly and long-time

residents stayed with friends and family in surrounding towns after the storm. Numerous elderly people eventually permanently relocated to these places [Betty Osborne, 2009]. As a result, the elderly residents who remained in Greensburg experienced a significant loss to their social insiderness. One elderly resident who continued living in Greensburg explains that her social life evaporated after the tornado [Helen Todd, 2009]. Many of her close, long-time friendships ended, because they left Greensburg. She explains that not having her friends with her after the disaster was the biggest drawback to living in Greensburg after the tornado [Helen Todd, 2009]. Over time, those who remained in Greensburg began to develop a new social insiderness.

Many people who were formerly considered acquaintances became close friends during the rebuilding of Greensburg. Before the storm, daily socializing was conducted over coffee at the Kansan Restaurant or the farmer's co-operative. However, after the tornado no coffee house or restaurant existed initially. Through shared experiences that outsiders cannot fully relate to and shared emotional healing, people were drawn closer together. Eventually a makeshift coffee house in the maintenance shed of a local business fostered a suitable place for emotional healing and relationships to develop and strengthen. Overall, Greensburg's elderly residents' social insiderness was greatly altered, because some long-time relationships ended and new ones formed.

Interestingly, some former elderly residents continued to socialize together even after moving away from Greensburg. At the McDonalds in Pratt, Kansas, about a dozen former residents meet daily to drink coffee and to visit. Former Greensburg residents from as far away Wichita and Hutchinson attend when possible. Like the makeshift coffee house in Greensburg after the disaster, a great deal of emotional healing occurred

during the time spent together. By sharing their stories, most of them became close friends. The current and former elderly residents of Greensburg experienced significant changes in their social life, which directly affected their social insiderness to Greensburg.

The Greensburg tornado had profound affects on its predominantly elderly population's connection to the town. The findings in this thesis have helped to make some conclusions about the elderly's emotional bond they feel to their hometown. First, several of the elderly do not embrace going *Green*. My findings suggest that two main factors contribute to this lack of support for environmentally conscientious building.

First, some long-time residents feel an animosity towards outsiders coming into their community and telling them how they need to rebuild their town. Many of these outsiders were city planners and experts in *Green* design. However, some were prominent figures, such as Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama and celebrity Leonardo DiCaprio. Although outsiders did not directly make decisions in regards to the building of the town, they heavily influenced the decisions made by local officials. One elderly, former resident of Greensburg voices that Greensburg's city officials only focused on how great the town might become in the future, while completely disregarding the feelings of its long-time residents [Wayne Dugger, 2009]. Beyond the elderly's distrust of outsiders, another reason motivates many to not embrace going *Green*.

The idea to go *Green* is a relatively new concept. Some truth exists in the colloquial expression that you cannot teach an old dog new tricks. The older generations do not see the practicality in building eco-friendly. Added upfront costs of building *Green* are said to be eventually offset by reduced energy bills. However, someone in

their advanced years likely has less time left on this earth than younger individuals, which causes them to question its value. Greensburg's elderly residents simply wanted their town rebuilt how it was before the disaster [John Rosenberger, 2009]. As cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan emphasizes, people are drawn to what is familiar [Tuan 1974]. In all, many of Greensburg's long-time residents put little stock in going *Green* and would rather stick to what they knew and understood.

Other communities have an opportunity to learn from how Greensburg responded to a natural disaster. Even though this is a unique town and it benefits from resources not readily available to all communities, there are components of Greensburg's rebuilding process that others with a similar situation should embrace. For instance, they must recognize that Greensburg's decision to go *Green* has retarded their rebuilding process, because a limited amount of contractors and architects are qualified to implement eco-friendly building methods [Kent Colwell, 2009]. Because little progress had occurred over an extended period of time, residents permanently relocated elsewhere [Wayne Dugger, 2009]. These implications should be carefully considered when contemplating rebuilding environmentally conscientious. It is possible for others to embrace *Green* technologies, but it would be in their best interest to focus their initial efforts on rebuilding places that locals hold significant.

My study suggests that local residents consider a few places in their town to have an elevated level of importance. Among these places are local churches, spaces where they gather for coffee, and venues where they socialize, such as the post office. With these places in mind, I recommend to communities recovering from a natural disaster to rebuild these places first. For instance, not until the make shift coffee house was opened

in Greensburg did residents feel like part of their routine was back. Another example is Greensburg's efforts to foster a place of worship before any churches' temporary structures were available. By focusing initial efforts on these key spaces, survivors will likely experience some elements of normalcy and may remain a local resident.

The findings of this study have also provided insight into what the elderly do not like about a community as well as what they find pleasing, which leads me to my third conclusion. If communities plan on attracting and prospering from the masses of Baby Boomers reaching retirement age, then they must be in tune with what they want. Geographer Graham Rowles's study [1990] provides a generic insight into how the elderly are attached to their hometown in Appalachia. However, my thesis identifies specific things that the elderly like about their community and some dislikes as well. For instance, they are attracted to its small, familiar setting and local character, but tend to dislike the new houses with little character. These types of things need to be considered when attempting to attract Baby Boomers as new residents.

My fourth conclusion relates to a time component. We have learned from geographer Richard Nostrand's work on homelands [1993] that time spent with a place contributes and strengthens one's emotional attachment. Many elderly Greensburg residents, both current and former, have invested more years of their lives developing an emotional connection with the Old Greensburg than they have left. Therefore, most of them cannot experience an attachment equal in magnitude to what they once had with the Old Greensburg, because they simply do not have enough time to reestablish a comparable bond.

The severely mangled and uprooted trees in Greensburg provide an analogy of the notion that elderly residents lack the necessary time to feel a similar strength of attachment to their community. Before the tornado, a long-time resident of Greensburg by the name of John Rosenberger planted and tended to trees on his property [John Rosenberger, 2009]. After the storm, he could not bring himself to look at his severely damaged trees. Worse yet, he recognizes that he does not have enough time left in his life to grow new trees to replace the ones he lost. The damaged trees are symbolic of John's emotional connection to Greensburg. His place attachment has been destroyed and mangled just like his trees. Similar to his inability to regrow them, he lacks the necessary time to cultivate an attachment to place that resembles what he once had. Greensburg simply changed too significantly too late in John's life.

Many long-time residents who moved away from Greensburg permanently find themselves without a bond to their present community, which brings me to my fifth conclusion. Greensburg's former, elderly residents tend to focus more on retaining the memory of the Old Greensburg rather than embracing their own new community or the New Greensburg for that matter. For example, even after three years, one tornado survivor and former resident, Dean Belcher, still cannot talk about Greensburg, see photos of the devastation, or drive through the community without commenting that all the buildings should have been rebuilt in their former locations [Gloria Belcher, 2009]. These former residents seem to struggle to get past the fact that everything they knew and loved has changed.

My final conclusion pertains to the importance that social connections have on one's bond with a place. The findings in my study suggest that one's social relationships

are the single most influential factor in developing an emotional connection to a place. Psychologists Setha Low and Irwin Altman claim in theory that relationships may be the most significant in determining where one forms a place attachment, but findings identify examples in the field that suggest this claim appears to be true. Immediately after the tornado, the elderly tornado survivors' lives were up in the air and meaningless. Not until a makeshift coffee house was established in a local business did some degree of normalcy return. It was the social bonding that brought their life back in check.

Even if the people of Greensburg could have rebuilt an identical town, the elderly's place attachment still would have been altered. One cannot rebuild or emulate the dynamics that an individual person brings to a community. It was the people who made Greensburg home. The personal relations are what gave residents a strong place attachment to Greensburg. Sadly, 10 residents lost their lives in the storm. Beyond the deaths, many elderly residents chose not to rebuild their houses and lives in Greensburg. These people are irreplaceable and indispensable to the place attachment experienced by the elderly in Greensburg before the tornado. It does not matter if one calls this social insiderness, friendships, social network, or relationships; it is the single most important component of one's place attachment to their hometown. Unfortunately for Greensburg's elderly, it was lost and as a result, the elderly's place attachment to Greensburg, Kansas, was changed forever.

Beyond the scope of my thesis, a couple questions arose while conducting fieldwork in Greensburg that would further advance our knowledge of place attachment. First, can memories of a place of attachment sustain one's bond to a place? The current place attachment literature states that repeated visits to a place contribute to feelings of

place attachment [Jackson 1996]. However, one elderly resident of Greensburg mentioned that she often found herself remembering what used to be on Greensburg's Main Street as she walked along its sidewalk. Better understanding this question would determine if repeated visits to an existing place are necessary to one's place attachment.

From my research, I discovered that a Mennonite community was also affected by the tornado that struck Greensburg. According to local Greensburg resident, John Rosenberger, several people from other Mennonite communities helped them rebuild what they had lost in the storm [John Rosenberger, 2009]. The Mennonites did not rebuild with a focus on *Green* building methods like the town of Greensburg. If many of the people rebuilt places resembling what had previously existed, it would provide an opportunity to compare the change in attachments between a heavily modified landscape in Greensburg to one that resembles a former place of attachment.

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