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## VALUES IN PLACE: INTERSECTING VALUES IN RAILS TO TRAILS LANDSCAPES

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Lisa Rainey Brownell

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky  
2011

VALUES IN PLACE: INTERSECTING VALUES IN RAILS TO TRAILS  
LANDSCAPES

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By  
Lisa Rainey Brownell

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Karl Raitz, Professor of Geography

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation is a study of the values and meanings people attach to places and why exploring those values is important in trails and historic preservation planning. From a foundation in critical humanistic geography and values based preservation literatures, the dissertation examines three rails to trails projects as case studies. Primary research questions include: how does a landscape become valued, devalued, and/or revalued through time? In what ways do different values of different people or groups intersect in rails to trails landscapes and how do they shape the landscape? How do historic values intersect with economic, social, political, and other values as these relate to landscape preservation? A subset of questions deals with the interactions between trails, historic preservation, and geography. What common ground do these three areas already share and what is the potential for further connections between and through them?

The project contributes to the geographical tradition of interpreting ordinary landscapes but also works towards bringing together the common ground of three disparate endeavors: cultural geography, historic preservation, and trails planning around the theme of “values in place.”

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Landscape, Values, Rails to Trails, Historic Preservation

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Lisa Brownell

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January 21, 2011

VALUES IN PLACE: INTERSECTING VALUES IN RAILS TO TRAILS  
LANDSCAPES

By

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DISSERTATION

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The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky

2011

VALUES IN PLACE: INTERSECTING VALUES IN RAILS TO TRAILS  
LANDSCAPES

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DISSERTATION

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2011

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Dedicated to Ellie, whose arrival both delayed and inspired the completion of this project.

And to Jonas: you will never know a Mama distracted by dissertation work.

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## Chapter 1 : Introduction



Figure 1.1.1: Between Versailles and Lawrenceburg, in Anderson County, Kentucky (near Young's High Bridge). Rail trail advocates, including the Kentucky Rails to Trails Council and the Rails to Trails Conservancy have been working on negotiating the conversion of this corridor to a trail for many years.

Places have a lot to tell us if we take some time to stop, look, and listen. The everyday places people's communities create reflect what that community values (Jackson 1980). This dissertation focuses on one particular type of everyday place: relict railroad corridors. Many communities have an interest in converting these places into pedestrian trails built upon abandoned railroad right of way. Rail trail landscapes often become community gathering places, transportation routes, and places of historic preservation where a remnant of a past time gains a new use.

Rail trails are a bit of an odd choice though as a place to study historic preservation in action – many people involved don't view it as historic preservation.

Many believe historic preservation is only about important houses where important men lived (and died); architecturally accurate restorations; corbelling and cornices; and, of course, places marked with plaques. Rail trails have some of those historic characteristics, but they are by default historic preservation in action – preserving a transportation corridor intact, even if there is no historic building, bridge, or tunnel. Alternative uses after railroad abandonment (other than trails) usually end up fragmenting the corridor and that remnant of the past is lost. Reusing railroad corridors as trails preserves the integrity of the corridor that was assembled for the original use and gives visitors a sense of what it was like before.

Many in historic preservation see the highest and best use for historic structures and sites to be continued active everyday use instead of “museum-izing” them. The preservation of rail corridors as rail trails accomplishes this. There is a logical and perceptual connection between historic preservation and the rails to trails movement. One of my research goals is to bridge this gap and strengthen the connections.

I am particularly drawn to the idea that rail trails tell a story about values in place<sup>1</sup>. Once, the corridor was valued for its economic promise – industry and commerce depended on railroads. Goods and people moved in and out. There was no more important link in the US than the railroads. Railroads gained a value beyond economics too – they helped shape the national imagination, played an important part in our story of growth, change, settlement, and development. Railroads became an icon that’s still powerful today. But things changed. Cars and trucks altered the American transportation

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<sup>1</sup> Values in place is a phrase borrowed from Brian Goodey, though I do not use it in the same sense that he does (Goodey 1982).

scene. The economic reality of railroads shifted. Lines were abandoned and tracks were pulled as people and goods moved more by highway than by railway. Railroad corridors in communities across the nation became devalued. These were places of derelict buildings, weeds, trash, crime (or at least a perception of it); they were eyesores, ignored (Jakle and Wilson 1992). Then as the idea of reusing the corridors for recreation spread, a revaluation of these places happened. Now, they are once again valued for their transportation usefulness, but this time to two-wheeled commuters. Once again they are community gathering places – not at the depot for the afternoon mail or the arrival of relatives – but as a daily routine of recreation that brings a community’s people out to meet together. Values about exercise and health, economic development and tourism, historic preservation and education are played out around the development of rails to trails projects around the country.

It is in this context that I began to explore the idea of “values in place”, or what preservationists term “values-based” or “values-centered preservation.” This preservation principle provides a way to address “both the contemporary and historic values of a place” (Mason 2006). Already we can see that we’re talking about values – ones that change over time, that are different from one person or group to the next, and that can be wildly different even for one place at one time. When the practice of preservation planning flows from this framework it necessarily means that we have to find out what these different values are – by inviting participation, by listening and talking to the stakeholders be they lay people or experts – and leaving room to adapt as these values shift over time.

This is hardly a new idea. In the world of transportation planning, engineers and planners have formally focused on context sensitive design (CSD) since the late 1990s. CSD – or as it is commonly now known: Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) – now augment the AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) engineering manual that is the standard for highway design<sup>2</sup>. The Federal Highway Administration had a goal for CSS integration into all state departments of transportation by 2007. By 2010, slightly more than half of the states have some sort of policy or legislation relating to CSS and more than two thirds of the states’ department of transportation staff have participated in CSS training (Context Sensitive Solutions Clearinghouse).

The idea that values get played out in places and that community values are important in creating and understanding places has a long history in geography as well. Geographers have long thought and wrote about the “meanings of place” and “sense of place” and the ways that values and meanings are created and assigned and interpreted in different ways in different times and places. (Jackson 1980, Lewis 1979, Duncan and Duncan 2001c, Massey 1993, and many others)

But in historic preservation, how have community values been approached? The everyday practice of preservation has been “top down”. Professionals determine which places are the important ones that should be designated as officially historic. But this is certainly changing as preservation efforts focus new attention on vernacular landscapes, places important to the everyday lives of workers, immigrants, the poor, slaves, Native Americans, and so on. Also, in preservation scholarship and practice, until recently, there

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<sup>2</sup> *Flexibility in Highway Design (FHWA1997)* is the CSS handbook for transportation professionals.

has been an implicit idea that value is somehow just “there.” Indeed, the National Register of Historic Places nomination criteria statement begins by saying “The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture *is present* (it’s just present) in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association” (see Box 2.2 on p. 30). But why is it present? Who decides what is significant and why? Values-based preservation is a reaction to this – it is a purposeful attempt to address the significance of places by finding out what people value about historic landscapes.

I have examined these ideas through three in depth case studies in two states (two in Kentucky and one in Minnesota). The Muhlenberg County Rail Trail in western Kentucky is an example of a trail that was planned almost entirely without public input or asking the people in the community what they value. In the end the trail itself ended up being a highly valued part of the community, but it was a difficult process. The way it has developed as an important community place is instructive on how people value historic landscapes and how they remake those places to fit with their values. The Oldham County Greenway in La Grange, Kentucky, is an example of a trail that came from local support but one that adapted as local values became clearer and as difficulties along the way forced changes to the plan. The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and trails in St. Paul, Minnesota, is an example of a grassroots project that had its origin and its success rooted in the involvement of many local and state stakeholders. Values as diverse as ecological restoration, historic preservation, and Native American sacred sites are represented at this place through the way it was developed and interpreted.



## **Research Questions**

My central research questions were: how does a landscape become valued, devalued, and/or revalued through time? The title of this dissertation was my central theme: values in place. In what ways do different values of different people or groups intersect in rails to trails landscapes and how do they shape the landscape? How do historic values intersect with economic, social, political, and other values as these relate to landscape preservation? How have different discourses expressed their values in the context of rail corridor conversions? And what does knowing about values in place (what they are and whose they are) contribute to in the planning process? Who should care? Why should we care? And what should be done with the knowledge? A subset of questions deals with the interactions between trails, historic preservation, and geography. What common ground do these three areas already share and what is the potential for further connections between and through them?

I am defining discourse as a certain “way of talking about and understanding the world” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:1), a sense of shared meaning (Duncan 1990, Schein 1997). But this definition includes an understanding that even though a discourse “fixes meaning in a particular way,” it does not command meaning to be “fixed exactly in that way forever” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:29). It is understood that meanings are not fixed across time, space, or different social groups. This definition of discourse is not confined to a sense of only language or visual communication but to all “social practice” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:67, after Fairclough 1993, 1995). In this dissertation, some of the key discourses whose ideas and meanings are expressed through the trail landscapes include local and national trail advocates, historic preservation interests (local

and national), local citizens and community groups, and advocates for smart growth, walkable communities, and active living.

### **Outline of dissertation sections**

I begin by introducing the three major concepts relevant in this study: historic preservation, rails to trails, and values-based preservation. Next I situate my research within the larger geographical, historic preservation, and trails literatures. Within geography, my research is at home in the long legacy of landscape and place studies that focus on everyday places and the meanings of those places to the people and groups that use them. Within the larger cultural landscape body of human geography research, I identify most with critical humanistic geography as a way to best address the influence of not only institutions on places, but to also examine the relationship between places and individuals. Within historic preservation, much research has begun to borrow from cultural landscape literatures in geography. What resonates most with my research is an endeavor called “values-based preservation.” Briefly, this is a theory/method that involves investigating the values held by members of a community and then incorporating those values into a development project. I discuss all of these theoretical frameworks at greater length in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4 I discuss my methodological frameworks that I employed in field work and archival research and how they tie back to the theoretical foundations upon which my work is built. I tacked back and forth between the archive and the field, each informing steps in the other. In a quest to find out what people value about places, it was essential to talk to those people, but in examining how they portrayed these values the archive was useful too.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 comprise the in-depth discussion of the case study sites. For these three sections I employ Richard Schein's methodological framework for interpreting cultural landscapes (Schein 2009). This framework starts in Chapter 5 with the histories of each place, an explanation of what the sites look like, how they got that way, and what has changed over time.

Chapter 6 is an examination of the meanings and values that intersect at each site. Each of the three case studies has some values in common, but each has unique values that are present. These values were gleaned from a combination of participant observation, archival research, and interviews with stakeholders.

Chapter 7 concludes with an exploration of the way that these intersecting values and meanings serve to mediate and facilitate the wide variety of agendas held by the numerous stakeholders at each site. It also examines the way stakeholder discourses are materialized in the landscapes (Schein 1997, 2009). I conclude the dissertation by outlining the connections of the research and future directions for further research.

### **Theoretical contributions**

Through my work I extend the geographic discussion about how meaning is mapped onto the world through articulations of public memory in place, and how identities are contested and negotiated there. I want to situate historic preservation and trails planning as spaces where this happens, and not just at monuments, memorials, and museums but as historic landscapes of everyday life (Glassberg 2001, Hayden 1995) such as rail trails. There is still a lot of potential for connections between geography and historic preservation, though many researchers are weaving them together. Critical human geography together with a sensitive understanding of place experience can inform

historic preservation research and practice, and a study of historic preservation in places can inform geographical explorations of meaning, collective memories, and identities articulated in place.

My case studies of railroad corridor trails are examples of places that are centers of meaning in the lived experience of people (Tuan 1976, Godkin 1980). It would seem that they are rather inconsequential – unlike national landmarks or memorials to tragic pasts – but on further thought, they are meaningful through their everyday-ness, the way they are woven into the daily lives of people. In connecting special places, trails become special places. In addition, this study fills a hole in scholarship; “both preservationists and geographers have ignored” the rails to trails movement and its role in historic preservation (Bowen 2008: 40).

I am concerned about building a nuanced and careful understanding of people’s experiences in trails landscapes. I tried to combine the understanding of the multiplicity of places with an attempt to understand how people really understand this multiplicity. I thought I would discover that (at least) some people understand (at least) some of the multiplicities at work constructing and contesting meaning in places. Though Duncan (1990: 18) argues that an outsider (and academic) perspective can help to bring “unacknowledged causal conditions” to light, he does affirm the importance of exploring and taking seriously the way people think of and find meaning in places. A combination of an outsider/academic viewpoint with a careful examination of local stakeholders’ viewpoints leads to a more nuanced understanding of the meanings at work in place.

My research contributes to conversations in geography around place meaning and value, expressions of public memory in the landscape, and how meaning and value are constructed and contested in place. Though there is hardly a recognizable subfield called critical humanistic geography, I think that is the most fitting home for my work (Adams, et al. 2001). It seems that humanistic geography lacked clear direction in attempts to define the perspective and how to carry out studies within it (Relph 1981). This is an attempt in that direction, but it is informed by critical understandings of systems of power and influence beyond the individual and beyond the local. In that way, this dissertation is also an attempt toward a nuanced, critical understanding of the complexities of place; understanding that neither of these projects is complete and my contributions won't complete them.

### **Applied contributions**

Understanding the way trails are meaningful can have implications for the planning, development, and management of trails (Coeterier 2002, Hayden 1995). Understanding the ways people engage with historic landscapes, locally valued places of community interaction, or landmarks can help shape planning to better meet people's needs, to avoid previous pitfalls, and to be more effective from the start.

One of the most significant barriers to trail development is public opinion. It is extremely common for communities to see a negative value to trail development: they associate it with increased crime, lower property values, trespassing, noise, wasted public dollars, or simply the idea that it has nothing to do with them or their lives. A better understanding of how people and communities engage with and value the past in places

can teach trail planners how to engage people in the planning and visioning process<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps a lesson from the Muhlenberg County trail that could be applied elsewhere is that people value reminders of the past through what they conceive of as a historic landscape. Questions of authenticity don't appear to affect the meaning of place in people's experience. Without this lesson, planners might rely on customary preservation practice that emphasizes restoration as close as possible to a documentable, verifiable past.

Examining how trails become special places of community activity can also inform trail development and management. Attention to what aspects are most valued by people help trail planners to meet community needs. The Rails to Trails Conservancy casts trails in a role of physical and symbolic connectivity. Trails physically connect people to places such as neighborhoods, schools, shops, parks, and civic amenities. They also connect people through interactions among neighbors, family members, and community members of different ages, abilities, and background. Finally, they connect people to the past through reuse and interpretation of historic corridors, structures, and artifacts (RTC website). While these generalizations are certainly debatable in particular places and cases, a better understanding of how people actually experience these connections can enhance the process.

There are numerous parallels with context sensitive design in highway planning. This is a process that incorporates a community's values into the process from the start and it can have a critical effect on the success of a project. The Federal Highway Administration defines context sensitive design as

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<sup>3</sup> Visioning is the actual term used in the field of public participatory planning. It is defined as a process by which the values and shared goals for a site/community are delineated through community involvement activities. These values are then incorporated into the plan for changes/new construction in the community.

a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility (FHWA 2004b).

This approach is fairly new in highway planning and it should be more intuitive for trails planning – trails are more likely in the first place to fit into a place’s context. But in trails planning there is not much reflection on the way people’s values may vary from place to place – they are generalized for the whole nation. The mere act of building a rail trail seems to satisfy an important goal in opposition to the status quo, but the way that trails are planned is equally important once that first barrier is overcome.

I anticipate my research to be useful to trails planners by introducing another dimension to trail planning in demonstrating the importance of a careful understanding of community values and place meanings. These insights can be applied to historic preservation as well. In addition, a secondary goal of my research in the practical realm is to increase awareness among trails and historic preservation interests of the immense potential for cooperation. Values-based preservation, as a theory/method, is the thread binding all of the different pieces together. As a theory, it is based on the belief that values matter in the way that places shape people and people shape places and that it is important to know what people and what values are at play in a place. As a method, it can inform academic geographic research and is quite similar to what geographers have previously endeavored to do through ethnography as they examine senses of place. It is also vital to historic preservation and trails planning practice. Professionals must inquire about the community’s values when working on a new project and must allow the projects to be informed and directed by those values. This research makes the

connections between these three areas more apparent and suggests ways that practitioners of each can strengthen these connections.



## Chapter 2 : Rails, trails, and historic preservation: an introduction

In this chapter I will introduce three fundamental elements of my research: railroads, rail trails, and historic preservation. This chapter introduces the reader to the contexts in which these three elements function and also the ways in which they interact. Because the connections between the three may not be initially clear, the chapter examines the argument for their connections and the fruitfulness of examining rails to trails landscapes as places of historic preservation.

### A brief history of railroad abandonment

At its peak in 1916, the rail network in the United States included some 254,000 miles of railroad (RTC 2010). The current inventory is around 140,000 miles (Association of American Railroads 2009). What has happened that so much was abandoned? And what has happened to those corridors that were abandoned?

Table 2.1: Railroad Mileage: Percent lost from 1920 to 2008

Place	1920 miles	2008 miles	% lost
Kentucky	3929	2558	35%
Minnesota	9114	4528	50%
United States	254,037	139,326	45%

2008 data from Association of American Railroads

1920 data from *The Routledge Historical Atlas of the American Railroads*, Stover 1999

Figure 2.1: Railroads of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century



From: *A Basic History of the United States*, 1944, Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard

While rail lines were abandoned during every decade since the first lines were built, there were certain eras that stand out with more abandonments. During the Depression years many railroad companies became unprofitable and failed. The need for scrap metal during the years of WWII spurred the salvage of functionally abandoned or otherwise marginal lines. The war brought a short-lived increase in business and prosperity for railroads, but steady decline returned shortly after the war ended.

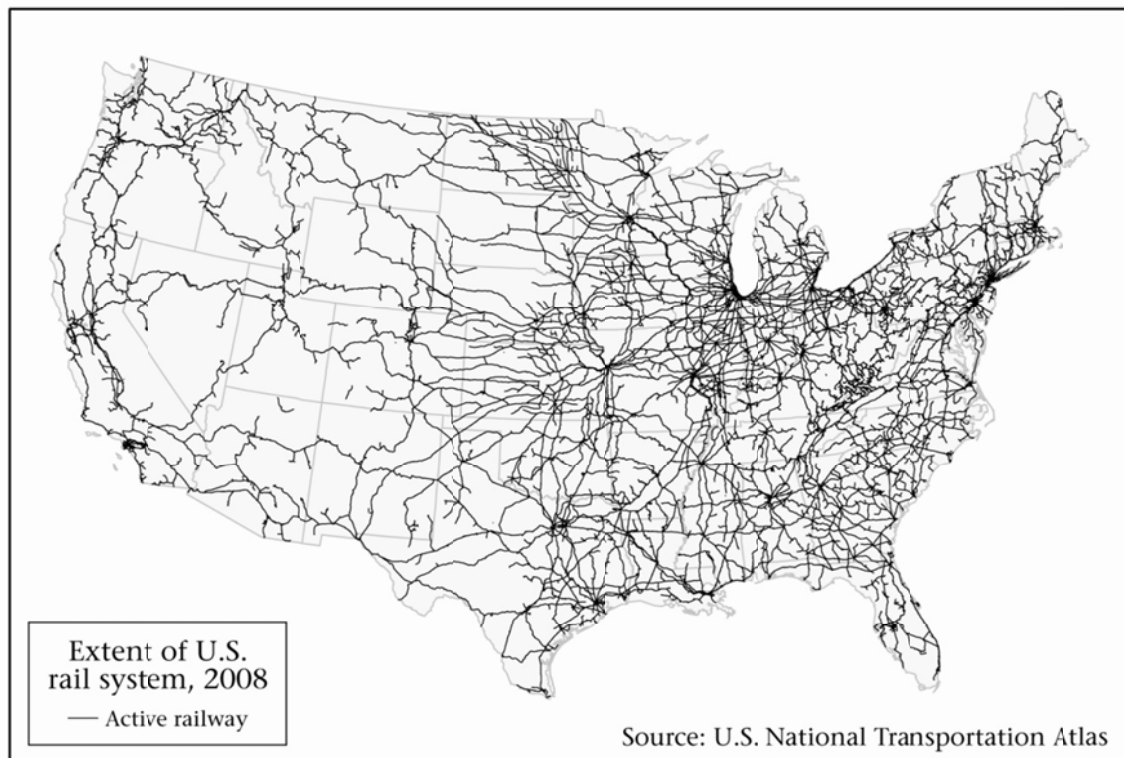
This activity coincided with a rise in automobile and truck use in the U.S. More areas became accessible by car and more goods began to be shipped by truck, although scholars debate how primary the influence of the auto was on the demise of railroads. Railroad abandonment is also a product of a wide array of variables that changed in

importance over time and from place to place. These variables related to poor management of the railroad companies, labor issues, changes in markets affecting shippers, burdensome regulation, initial over-construction, and unequal government subsidies to other modes of travel (Black 1975, Saunders 2001). Other factors include rising fuel and maintenance costs. The 1960s were “characterized by the collapse and consolidation of many great railroads, and by the abandonment of passenger service by nearly all of the surviving roads” (Yenne 2005: 10). Indeed, Amtrak was born in 1971 as an answer to the loss of passenger service during the 1960s (Saunders 2001).

During the 1970s, the Interstate Commerce Commission streamlined the abandonment process, allowing carriers to abandon lines more easily and quickly (Schweiteman 2001). Another wave of railroad abandonment came in the 1970s and 1980s as almost all of the major railroad companies in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions faced bankruptcy. The federal response to the crises in the rail industry included the 1973 Regional Rail Reorganization Act (3-R Act), which allowed for the creation of Conrail, a federal corporation to take over operation of seven bankrupt freight lines (these were: Penn Central, Erie Lackawanna, Lehigh & Hudson River, Boston & Maine, Ann Arbor, Lehigh Valley, and Reading) (Schwieterman 2001). This led to further abandonment of redundant and marginal lines. The 3-R Act focused on the bankrupt lines of the Northeast and Great Lakes; the 4-R Act (Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act of 1976) addressed railroad issues nationwide. This act mandated public rail planning and made state rail planning a requirement in order to participate in federal rail subsidy programs. This was a change from previous years when the planning of railroad networks was left to railroad companies and to their regulatory

bodies. It was apparent that coordinated rail planning at the state and federal levels was necessary because “coordinated federal-state policy featuring large scale public planning for the provision of rail services was virtually non-existent prior to 1973” (Hord1978:53).

Figure 2.2: Extent of U.S. rail system, 2008



Map created by Mike Foster, University of Minnesota Cartography Lab

The railroad industry was further deregulated in the United States after the Staggers Rail Act in 1980, as the federal government gave up control over pricing and marketing (Association of American Railroads 2010). Though this act was only one of many changes in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that had great impact on the American railroad scene, the Staggers Act “did change the economics of American railroading fundamentally and forever” (Saunders 2001: 188). This act also required the ICC to process abandonments more quickly. As a result of the change in regulations, railroads

were able to lower their costs, lower prices for shippers, and increase their productivity and profitability (Wilner 1997). Because of the drive for greater efficiency and the eased abandonment process, more lines were abandoned during this time.

The 1980s were also a time of important railroad company mergers. Instead of the old way of powerful railroad companies absorbing smaller, weaker lines, now railroad mergers and consolidations were between strong companies. Some of these included the Norfolk & Western and Southern RY to become Norfolk Southern and the consolidation of the Chessie System (C&O and B&O) and the Seaboard System (L&N, Seaboard Coast Line, Atlantic Coast Line, and Carolina, Clinchfield & Ohio) into CSX Transportation (Wilner 1997). These are two of Kentucky's major companies today, along with Illinois Central (which itself is a result of a merger with Gulf, Mobile & Ohio and that now has been consolidated into Canadian National) and a variety of regional and small shortline carriers. Figure 2.2 shows the current national rail network including Class I carriers, regional railroads, and shortlines.

### **Railroad abandonment process**

A railroad company wishing to formally abandon a line (or portion of a line) must file an application with the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB). The STB took over abandonment authority from the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1995 when the ICC was abolished by an act of Congress (STB 1997). The carrier can apply to abandon their line if there has been no traffic over it in two years (called a "Notice of Exemption") and none of the former customers or communities served have registered a formal complaint over the lack of service. The exemption refers to the fact that they are exempt from the rigorous "regulatory scrutiny" from the federal agency (STB 1997:

2).The carrier can also apply if there has been so little traffic during the last two years that there was no chance for profit (called a “Petition for Exemption”). Companies serviced by the railroad can challenge these filings, but that is rare. The Surface Transportation Board reviews the balance between the railroad company’s economic losses stemming from operation of an unprofitable line with the impact on the community experiencing the loss of rail service (STB 1997). Permission to abandon is almost always granted if it is determined that the community impact is not too severe.

The application requires several things from the railroad: a system diagram map, a notice of intent published in newspapers in the affected communities, and the abandonment application narrative that lays out the costs, effects, and various informational data. The public then has a period of 45 days to contest the abandonment application (or to file for a Notice of Interim Trail Use). Prior to filing this application, the abandoning railroad also has to submit an environmental impact statement and a historic resources study (called Section 106 – see below for more information on this).

There are procedures in place to allow another company to buy the line and assume operations: the STB offers a document called *So You Want to Start a Small Railroad* to guide interested parties through this process. Another provision allows an organization to preserve the corridor for trail, commuter rail, energy transmission, or other alternative public uses (STB 2008, STB 1997). This is accomplished through a request for trail use/public use of the line. If this use is agreed to by the railroad and the STB, the line can then proceed to railbanking procedures.

Railbanking was defined by Congress in the National Trails System Act of 1983. Railbanking is a system by which a railroad wishing to abandon a corridor does not really abandon it in the sense that its property reverts to original or adjacent landholders, but the “railbanked” land is retained in corridor form and is then leased, sold, or given to a private or public entity that assumes management of the corridor. The purpose of railbanking is to maintain the integrity of the corridor for future railroad use, should it ever be needed, but to also secure its interim use as a trail.

Railroad property ownership only becomes an issue when the railroad abandons the line and wants to dispose of the corridor. Adjacent landowners often believe that, once abandoned, railroad land that was held in easements will revert to them. But in fact railroads acquired property for their corridors in a number of different ways and it is common to see many of these operating in a single corridor. Some railroad property is held in fee simple, where the railroad bought the land outright. Other property, particularly in the western United States, was granted to the railroad by the federal government. Portions of corridors were created through easements, where the railroad bought the right to run the corridor across a piece of property, but not the property itself. In some cases land was condemned for railroad use and in some it is unclear how exactly the railroad came to own the property (STB 1997, RTC 2009).

Railbanking addresses the problems faced by both the abandoning railroad and the public interests who want to secure an interim trail use. Disposing of many small property parcels is time consuming and expensive for railroads. Negotiating and paying for the purchase of multiple small parcels in order to reconstruct a corridor after it has been abandoned is very difficult, if not impossible, for trails groups. A railbanked

corridor can be sold in one piece by the railroad and the railroad does not have the expense of removing features like bridges since they have value to the new user.

The National Trails System Act railbanking provision has been challenged many times by opponents. Much of the opposition is tied to different understandings of what in fact should happen to railroad land at the point of abandonment. The Supreme Court “unanimously ruled, in the case of *Preseault v. United States*, that preserving a corridor for future rail use through railbanking is a legitimate exercise of governmental power. This decision protects a railroad's legal right to transfer all forms of its ownership, including easements, to a trail group” (RTC n.d., accessed 7/8/09). Continued legal action revolves around the idea that railbanking is preventing the use of a property by its rightful owner and thereby constitutes a “taking” of private property. Some small settlements have been paid by the federal government, but these have been rare (Brewer 2004).

### **The rails to trails movement**

Rail trails are recreational trails built on abandoned railroad corridors. After a railroad company abandons a line, they remove the tracks and the railbed (and often the bridges, tunnels, culverts, and other infrastructure) is reused as a base for a trail. The rails to trails movement had its origins in the 1960s with the Elroy-Sparta Trail in Wisconsin, the first formal rail trail developed in the US. Others soon followed, such as the Illinois Prairie Path near Chicago that also opened in the early 1960s. There are now almost 20,000 miles of rail trails in the US.

To some extent the timing of these developments is tied to the trends of railroad abandonment as many more lines became unprofitable and were abandoned in the 1960s



and 1970s. Especially after railroad deregulation in the 1980s, the pace of abandonment picked up as it became easier for a railroad company to cease operations on a line.

The national rail trail advocacy organization, the Rails to Trails Conservancy, was founded in 1986 – in response to the passage of the Trails System Act and the growth in rail trail development following the institution of railbanking. This organization, based in Washington, D.C., promotes policy at the federal and state levels, assists local trail organizations in developing trail networks, and provides general information on trails and greenways (including a GIS database of all trails, funding data, and “how to” materials).

As of 2010, there are 19,548 miles of rail trails (the cumulative mileage of 1,631 rail trails) in the US (RTC website 2010). Of that total, 2,764 miles of trails have been built using railbanked corridors (a total of 5,079 miles of corridors are railbanked, but the remainder has not yet been converted to trails) (Fowler 2009). Another 724 projects for an additional 8,676 more miles are in progress. Michigan (2,392 miles), Minnesota (2,327 miles), and Wisconsin (1,782 miles) have the greatest number of miles of trails, while Kentucky (32 miles), North Dakota (28 miles), New Mexico (26 miles), and Hawaii (16 miles) have the fewest (refer to Figure 2.3). The longest completed rail trail is the Katy Trail State Park in Missouri at 225 miles.



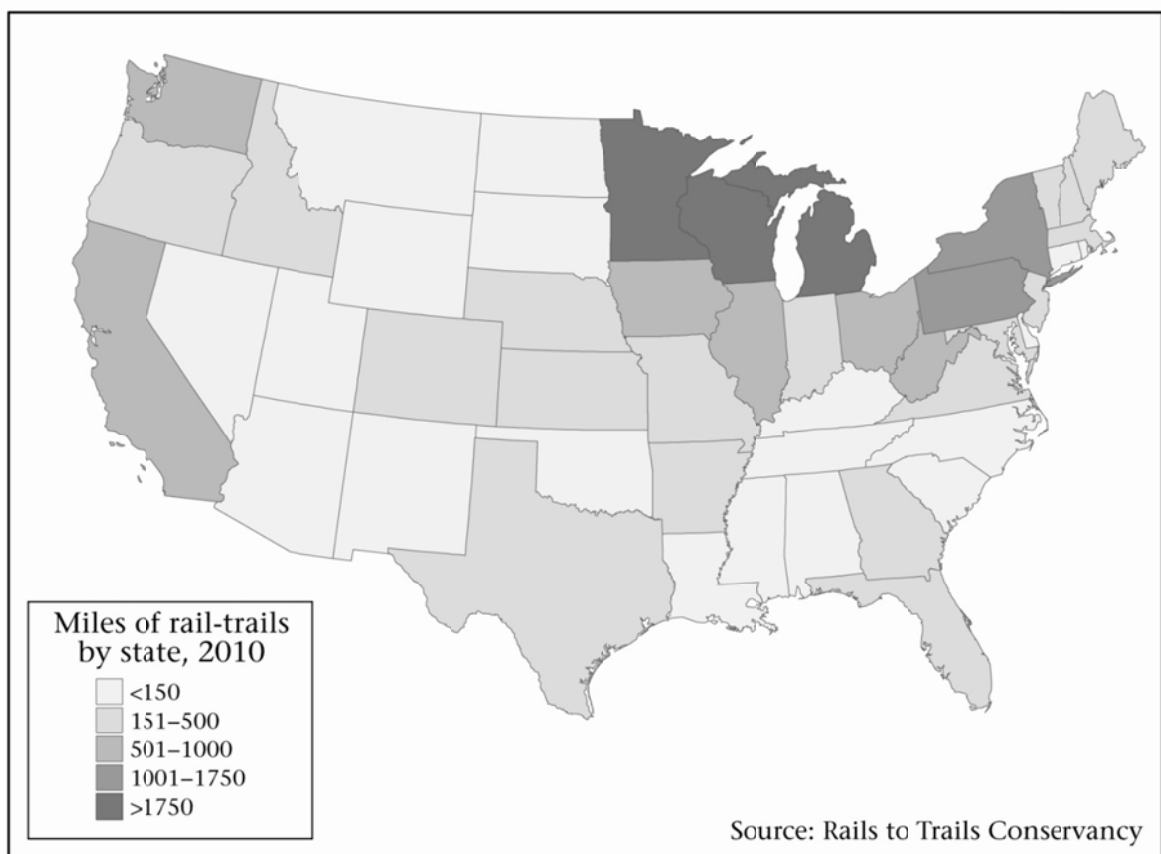
Figure 2.3: Wingo Rail Trail near Mayfield in western Kentucky

Some places have well developed trail systems – networks of urban and rural trails connecting towns, natural areas, parks, civic amenities, other modes of transportation, and residential and commercial areas. While many rail trails share a common vision of providing healthy transportation and safe recreation options, there is a wide range of other focuses. Some trails highlight historic features and places along the way, others are more focused on connections to nature, some are all about commuting, and others attract skiers or equestrians. Many trails, both rural and urban, play key roles in their local tourism industry.

Studies carried out by the Rails to Trails Conservancy and others show the tourism and economic benefits of trails (RTC n.d., RTC 2007a, RTC 2009). Communities enjoy increased property values and increased recreation-related spending because of the presence of trails. Development of trail-user support industries sometimes follows the

opening of a trail. Places such as bike rental and repair shops, cafes, campgrounds, gift shops, and other tourist attractions grow in trail communities. Some trails in urban areas attract residential and commercial development since they are such vital pathways. In places like that it is not tourist dollars as much as local residents who wish to live, work, or shop near the trail.

Figure 2.4: Miles of Rail Trails by State, 2010



Map created by Mike Foster, University of Minnesota Cartography Lab

Recently, trail advocates and healthy living advocates have joined forces to emphasize the importance of the built environment in the health outcomes of the public. Active transportation efforts ensure that residents have access to places to walk and

exercise (instead of just drive) in their daily life. This is not just a transportation issue but a key issue of public health in the realm of chronically high rates of obesity (RTC 2007).

Former railroad corridors are particularly well suited for conversion to bike/pedestrian trails because of realities of railroad engineering. Railroad locomotives are not able to climb grades beyond two or three percent. Grades above five percent are reserved for only a few (mostly now defunct) narrow gauge logging and mining railroads in extremely difficult topography. Some of these grades necessitated switch-backs which were not feasible for use with commercial freight or passenger lines. Trails converted from former railroad lines are by their nature accommodating to all users (assuming a paved surface). Novices and experts alike can enjoy a walk or ride without hills and trails can be built to ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards.

### **A brief history of historic preservation in the U.S.**

Historic preservation<sup>4</sup> is the process of preventing the destruction and promoting the rehabilitation and restoration of historic sites, structures, and landscapes with interpretation to the public where appropriate. One of the early preservation efforts in the US that continues to be instructive was the protection and restoration of Mount Vernon in 1858 by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association. Many early preservation projects were sites or buildings associated with the “founding fathers” of the US and were undertaken by volunteer members of elite groups. Historic preservation was a project of “little blue haired ladies in tennis shoes,” as the saying goes.

“So influential was Ann Pamela Cunningham’s victory at Mount Vernon that her efforts established certain presuppositions about historic preservation in America.

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<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere in the world historic preservation is referred to as heritage conservation or heritage preservation. The U.S. appears to be the only place to call it this.

These assumptions included the idea that private citizens, not government, were the proper advocates for preservation; that only buildings and sites associated with military and political figures were worthy of preservation; that such sites must be treated as shrines or icons; and that women would assume a dominant role in the acquisition and management of such properties. Thus was established the uniqueness of the preservation movement in America among sovereign states of the world.” (Murtagh 2006: 16)

An important foundation to the preservation movement was the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. The National Park Service (NPS) still plays an important role in preservation as the home of the National Register of Historic Places and as the agency that sponsors most federal preservation programs (Tyler 2000). In addition to the National Register, some of these programs include: the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record, National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, Park Historic Structures and Cultural Landscapes, Archeology and Ethnography Program, and the American Indian Liaison Office (Tyler 2000). Both the NPS and historic preservation are nested under the authority of the Secretary of the Interior. Indeed, the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation: Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* guides much preservation work in the U.S. The holy scripture of historic preservation work, SHPOs and other preservation officials judge projects against these standards and some funding relies on adherence to them (codified in 36 CFR 67 for use in the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program). These guidelines were originally written in 1977 and have been revised since then.

### Box 2.1: Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation: Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings

The ten standards are as follows. The guidelines are much more extensive and can be accessed at: <http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/tax/rhb/index.htm>.

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.
8. Significant archeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665) had a large impact on what the practice of historic preservation was to become in the US. The new interstate highway system and urban renewal programs' destructive effects on cities and

landmarks throughout the 1950s and 1960s were important factors that led to the passage of this act (Tyler 2000). The act also created the National Register of Historic Places. The National Historic Preservation Act shaped the philosophy and theory underpinning historic preservation practice, as well as outlining the procedures (Murtagh 2006, Tyler 2000). The federal government's concept of historic preservation broadened to include not just those sites and buildings of national significance but also those of regional, state, and local significance, as well as those with architectural merit (Murtagh 2006).

The National Register of Historic Places is “the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation” (National Park Service 2010) and it is housed within the National Park Service, under the Secretary of the Interior. Not only buildings, but also corridors, sites, structures, and entire districts comprised of many buildings and sites can be nominated to the National Register. Over 80,000 properties are listed in the National Register. Listing on the register does not protect a building or site from destruction, but it does offer it an “official status” and recognition as being historic and allows the site's owners to apply for various grants and tax credits that benefit historic buildings.

An important part of this legislation, “Section 106”, established a series of checks and balances to ensure that historically significant properties are not harmed in projects where federal money is spent (such as roads or bridges, HUD, railroads, etc.). This had an indirect effect on the practice of historic preservation. A professional industry of consultants who could perform Section 106 evaluations for government contracts grew in the years after 1966. Some consulting firms focus primarily on this aspect of preservation.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation is “an independent federal agency that promotes the preservation, enhancement, and productive use of our nation's historic resources, and advises the President and Congress on national historic preservation policy” (ACHP website). It too was formed as part of the 1966 Historic Preservation Act. The three main areas in which the ACHP works are in preservation initiatives (such as promoting heritage tourism); communication, education and outreach; and federal agency programs. The primary focus of the last area is the role ACHP plays in administering the review process for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. If there is a finding of adverse impact in a project under review, it must be mitigated by either reworking the plan or if destruction of a historic resource cannot be avoided, the resource must be thoroughly documented for the archive. Most decision-making on Section 106 reviews happens at the state level, but the ACHP gets involved in “controversial or precedent-setting situations” (ACHP website).

Another crucial piece of the historic preservation mosaic to come out of the 1966 Preservation Act was the creation of State Historic Preservation Offices (and officers). SHPOs serve as liaisons between the states and federal government on issues such as nominations to the National Register, Section 106 reviews, federal historic preservation tax credits, and preservation planning.



## Box 2.2: National Register criteria

Available here: [http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15\\_2.htm](http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_2.htm).

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A.** That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B.** That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C.** That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D.** That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- a.** A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or
- b.** A building or structure removed from its original location but which is primarily significant for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or
- c.** A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life; or
- d.** A cemetery which derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or
- e.** A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or
- f.** A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance; or
- g.** A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.

Private, non-profit advocacy organizations also play an important role in influencing policy, shaping outcomes for particular historic places, and working with the

public and policy makers. The pre-eminent national organization is the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Trust is “a private, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to saving historic places and revitalizing America's communities....Founded in 1949 [it] provides leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to protect the irreplaceable places that tell America’s story” (NTHP website). The organization is actually a quasi-public organization “with the purpose of linking the preservation efforts of the National Park Service and the federal government with activities of the private sector” (Tyler 2000: 42). The Trust is active in many aspects of preservation from sponsoring an annual conference to lobbying congress to launching public information campaigns. These campaigns often coincide with National Historic Preservation Week; the ad below (Figure 2.5) appeared in May 2003.

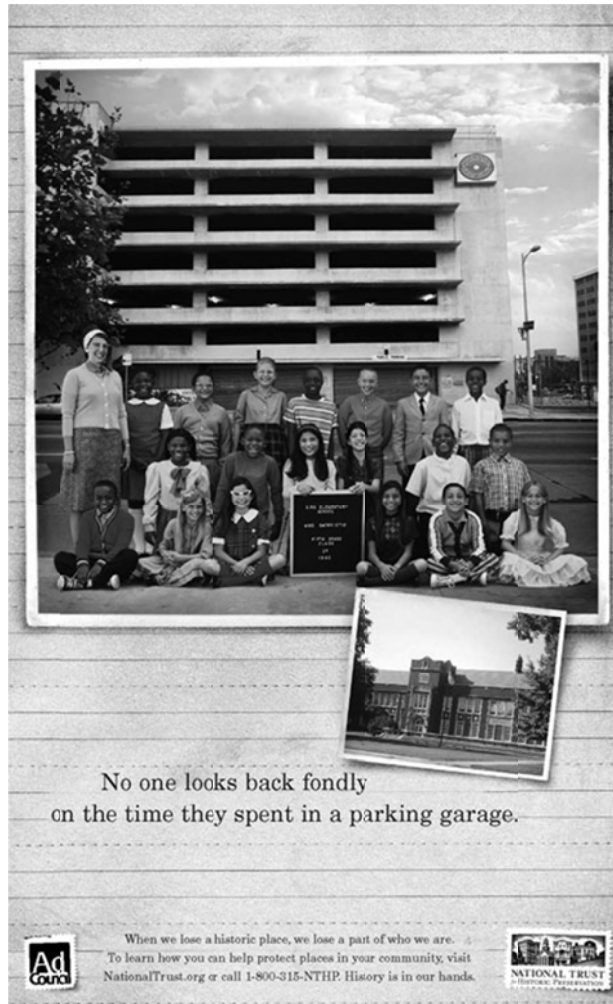


Figure 2.5: Ad for the National Trust for Historic Preservation that appeared in many print outlets during National Historic Preservation Week, May 5-12, 2003.

### **Some notes about current practice and research**

It was after the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act that preservation practice began to become more “professional, institutional, well-funded, and mainstream” (Marvelli 2006: ix). Higher education and graduate programs began; professional planners and consultants became more common, especially in relation to federal guidelines like Section 106 and nominations to the National Register. Forty years ago preservation lay-people far outnumbered paid professionals (Murtagh 2006). Now, volunteers are still integral to the practice of historic preservation through local boards

and commissions and historic sites, but it is increasingly professionalized. Since its origins in the US, historic preservation practice has shifted from “an elitist hobby to a populist movement to an academic course of study” (Thomson 2004: ix) and “a regulatory discipline” (Bentel 2004: 44). Current practice today is also characterized by both state organizations (SHPOs) and private preservation advocacy groups (like The Preservation Alliance of Minnesota) working with federal programs and offices (Murtagh 2006).

The philosophy of preservation practice has shifted to recognize the diversity of American cultures and places and the importance of telling the stories of all groups, not just those of the elite “fathers and mothers of American history.” Attention to Native American culture and place has been attested to by the establishment of the Tribal Historic Preservation Offices. There has also been a new focus on the places of vernacular or everyday life instead of just those of national importance and high architectural merit (Murtagh 2006, Lee 2004, Bentel 2004, Hayden 1995). Another important change has been from preserving primarily single landmarks (usually buildings) to preserving districts and entire historic landscapes. One can read the history of the preservation movement as a series of paradigm shifts: from patriotism and a “founding father focus” to a focus on buildings with strong aesthetic, architectural, and historic value (as defined at that time) to the latest shift with a focus on the much more intangible values and meanings of places (Murtagh 2006, Stipe 2003, Bentel 2004, Lee 2004).

The guiding theory behind preservation practice has also been shifting. Though some historic preservation scholars would argue that there was little theory applied to

practice until recently, there have always been underlying values and ideas that shaped the directions of preservation practice (Thomson 2004, Williams 2005). Norman Tyler writes “[t]he underlying philosophy of the historic preservation movement in the United States is defined more through activities than through theory. One could conclude ‘Preservation is as preservation does’” (Tyler 2000: 18). Stipe explains that “[p]reservation’s basic values have vastly changed since 1966. The early associative values centered almost exclusively on history and architecture as the most valued cultural resources. In recent years, however, we have moved beyond that narrow view” (2003:23). He speaks of preservation as an entity with ideas and values; by this he means the practice (and practitioners) of preservation as a whole. J. B. Jackson relates shifts in how historical events are commemorated through the built landscape with the way Americans’ views of the past have changed: no longer do we see “the basis of our historical existences as a sequence of political events” but we see the past as “a period usually referred to as The Old Days,” a time when “a kind of golden age prevailed” (1980: 98).

Even though there has been a shift in preservation theory, operationally preservation practice is still constrained by guidelines, policies, and programs that are focused on “material culture” (Stipe 2003: 462). The challenge, Stipe notes, is “to demonstrate the relationship between material culture – a building, a group of buildings, a landscape, a structure, an archeological site – with the larger set of intangible social and environmental values we seek to portray and preserve” and to then express those values to the public (2003: 462). Most state historic preservation offices endeavor to survey their state’s historic resources. These survey programs are more extensive inventories than the official National Register of Historic Resources or other official historic landmark

designations. Both Minnesota and Kentucky have well established survey programs and these are foundational to preservation planning. The inventory forms for both states still focus primarily on the material structures and site contexts: building materials, architectural styles, building function, maps, and photographs. But in Kentucky they have acknowledged the broadened scope of this endeavor from only homes of the elite leaders in Kentucky's early history to "a more comprehensive view of the cultural and historic resources that make Kentucky unique" including "barns and outbuildings, commercial buildings, industrial sites, cemeteries, monuments, objects, and landscapes" (KHC 2010).

Kentucky has over 83,000 properties in its inventory and these surveys can be completed by preservation professionals or SHPO staff as well as laypeople (we completed several as students in UKY's historic preservation documentation course). The survey in Kentucky is a two page form completed by the field recorder. The archeological survey in Kentucky is administered by the Office of State Archeology. Minnesota has more than 50,000 historic structures in their survey record and uses them not only to help identify which properties might need further preservation efforts, but also to help preservation planners develop a coherent system of property types and historic contexts which are then used in preservation planning. In addition to the standing structures inventory, Minnesota also maintains an archeology inventory that includes approximately 16,500 sites. Unlike Kentucky, Minnesota surveys must be completed by someone who meets the U.S. Department of the Interior professional qualifications standards and are recorded in report form (including bibliography, archival research, and an argument for which historic contexts the recorded property belongs to) instead of on a brief survey form. The records from these two inventories are available to the public at

the state historic preservation office in St. Paul, though some archeological survey records have restricted access in order to protect the sites.

In preservation practice there has been a shift towards an emphasis on “ambience and the preservation of place” instead of just buildings or historic associations (Stipe 2003: 465). Place theory, as Stipe explains it in the context of historic preservation, is

“built on a much more inclusive range of associative values than those enumerated in the National Register criteria....The concept is not hindered by crisply elaborated federal standards or necessarily by state-local regulatory processes....Place theory does not count numbers or calculate the percentage of ‘contributing’ or ‘noncontributing’ buildings. The associative values on which it is built value equally the vernacular with high style and the intangible with the tangible. Underlying all is an emphasis on local initiative and cooperation” (Stipe: 466).

Place theory in preservation practice meshes with the “cultural turn” in geography that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Mason advocates for a new notion of “the essential nature of significance” in historic preservation, one “that as an expression of cultural meaning, it must be expected to change, involve multivalence and contention, and be contingent on time, place, and other factors” (2003: 65) Places are understood not just as sets of individually, intrinsically historically significant buildings, but as wholes; as contexts that both reflect and shape the meanings held dear by those who live in and through and near them. Places are so much more than the sum of their parts.

Debates around the idea of “significance” demonstrate these theory shifts in preservation practice. A new understanding of the meaning of significance as a creation of the members of the culture who make, perceive, and use the place and not as something that resides, inherently, in places puts this theory into practice. I will address this debate in more detail in Chapter Three.

Currently, preservation advocates are working hard to sell preservation as economic development, as green/sustainable development, and as a jobs generator. In recession era budgets, endeavors such as historic preservation are often seen as non-essential, as extras for the wish list, but not worthy of funding when so many other budgets are decimated by decreased tax revenue or funding cuts. In Minnesota in 2010 advocates successfully lobbied for and secured passage of historic preservation tax credits legislation. After eleven previous failures of this bill, it is telling that it passed this year in light of record breaking budget shortfalls and the infamous “unallotment” decreed by Governor Tim Pawlenty (by which he reduced the state budget after it was approved by the legislature; the Minnesota Supreme Court later ruled that he violated the law and overstepped his authority). The reason the advocates were able to move the bill through to passage was because they aligned it with job creation, with building trades unions, architects, engineers, and local economic development and real estate interests. In addition they had data to support the fact that preservation projects generate more high paying jobs than conventional new construction (McDonald 2010). Kentucky implemented its historic preservation tax credit program in 2005. Thirty percent of rehabilitation expenses on owner-occupied structures are offered as a tax credit (not to exceed \$60,000). For other types of structures, a 20 percent tax credit is available. Since 2005 over \$9 million have been awarded in 214 projects (KHC 2010). Nationally, there is a Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program administered by the National Park Service in cooperation with the IRS and the State Historic Preservation Offices. This program, established in 1986, includes two tax credits: one is a 20 percent tax credit for certified rehab work done on certified historic buildings (not including owner occupied



residential buildings). The other is a 10 percent tax credit for rehab of non-residential and non-certified historic buildings built prior to 1936. Certified historic means that the building must be listed on the National Register of Historic Places or be in a National Register designated historic district (National Park Service 2009).

A recent proposal at the national level ties preservation to jobs and sustainability through an energy efficiency rebate program called HOME STARS (Lally 2010). This program assists owners to increase their property's energy efficiency by giving them rebates for replacing windows with better insulating ones. The historic preservation amendment allows owners to retrofit historic windows instead of just rewarding owners for trading old windows for (what are often) unsympathetically designed, character-destroying (and lower quality) replacements.

These examples bring us back to the idea of values, especially in the economic sense. Preservation has had to defend its economic value to communities and has had to work to quantify its values in terms of economic development, jobs, tax revenue, tourist revenue, and so on. This is a difficult venture in a realm whose focus is to preserve things with intangible (“priceless”) values of the cultural, historic, aesthetic, or memorial variety (Mason 2005:16).

### **Historic preservation and rail trails – how do they fit together?**

Are rail trails historic preservation? Or, why use rail trails as a case study to examine historic preservation, an unconventional choice? Why not use houses, buildings, districts, or even railroad depots as a focus? I could have chosen any number of historic districts, homes, battle sites, bridges, or civic buildings. But I believe railroad corridors provide an excellent example of how heritage values play out in everyday practice in

communities around the US. They are well suited to a study of this type because these trails are a place of everyday use. They are not museums or sites that people only visit on vacations or grade school field trips. They are not removed from daily life. In these places we can see how people really value historic places that they can use, be in, and experience, versus a historic site that is “set apart” or only occasionally used or experienced.

A corridor, as a space, is somewhere between a structure and a district. NRHP defines district as “a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development” and a structure as a “functional construction made for purposes other than creating shelter, such as a bridge” (National Park Service 1997). A corridor is a structure that forms the foundation around which a railroad district is formed. Marty Perry, National Register Coordinator for the Kentucky Heritage Council, presented the idea that railroad corridors can and should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places and that this action can work as a planning tool for both trail advocates and preservation advocates attending the 2002 Kentucky Trails and Greenways Conference. This was a novel idea to the trails folks there, mainly trail advocates and professionals from the Kentucky-Indiana region, who generally underestimate the historic importance of rail corridors (their focus is typically more on the recreational, health, or community aspects of trails). It was also off the radar for many historic preservation stakeholders who are more focused on historic structures, sites, and associations with influential people or important events.

A few railroad corridors (some abandoned, some active) have been successfully nominated to the National Register (19 in all [Merritt 2008])<sup>5</sup>. One of these examples is found in Minnesota: the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad Grade Separation (now in use as the Midtown Greenway, a bike and pedestrian trail in Minneapolis). This former rail line was nominated to the national register in 2005; the Greenway opened to trail traffic in 2000. The last active part of the rail line was abandoned just prior to that. The railroad was built through south Minneapolis in a grade-separating trench. This trench, the retaining walls, and the bridges are all included in the nomination as integral parts to the historic corridor. Other examples include: a portion of Western Maryland Railway which is now part of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park. Here, the argument was made in the nomination that the corridor was significant not so much for its history as a railroad corridor, but for its proximity to the route of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and its importance in protecting the integrity of that corridor (NRHP database).

While Perry continued to propose this idea to trails and historic preservation stakeholders in the Commonwealth, to my knowledge only one Kentucky rail corridor has been nominated to the National Register. This corridor is the Lexington Extension of the Louisville and Southern Railroad from Lawrenceburg to Versailles (including the Young's High Bridge at Tyrone). Perry (personal communication 2008) related that Kentucky used to have a standard response to railroad companies seeking abandonment

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<sup>5</sup> I count around 33 (NRHP Database 2008). Merritt offers no definition of what constitutes a "railroad corridor" for her count. Of the 33 railroad corridors nominated to the NR, if they are active, they are mainly tourist railroads. Many are abandoned and/or converted to trails. There is little to no precedent for declaring active freight railroads to the register.

approval: all corridors could be National Register eligible. This of course was not met favorably by the railroads, but the SHPO worked out a system with the railroads so that the process was not onerous, the losses were mitigated through the Section 106 process, and the railroads were, ultimately, able to abandon the lines they wanted to abandon. But with staff and leadership changes at the SHPO this agreement was no longer followed and they went back to the more conservative and more widely held opinion that only the depots, bridges, and other buildings and structures related to the railroads, not the corridors themselves, are National Register eligible.

Similar to the experience in Kentucky, Minnesota chose to approach historic railroad corridors proactively. The Minnesota Department of Transportation completed a study of historic railroad corridors in the state – including both active and abandoned corridors – so that they could plan ahead of time how best to evaluate these places for potential nominations to the National Register of Historic Places (Schmidt and Pratt 2007). This project also served to study the broader historical significance of the railroad in Minnesota and to create a Multiple Property Documentation Form, a tool that can be used for future studies and nominations. This project was not a survey of all railroad corridors in Minnesota, but a study of the state’s railroad resources and an assessment of the secondary sources available to document their histories.

In the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) called *Railroads in Minnesota 1862-1956*, submitted to the National Register of Historic Places, the authors of this document stated that “thousands of miles of historical-period railroad corridors are potentially eligible for listing in the national Register of Historic Places” (Schmidt and Pratt 2007:1). The purpose of this document was to assist future determinations of

National Register eligibility of railroad resources since it is very common for MN/DOT projects to impact rail corridors. The MPDF includes a description of what a railroad corridor historic district can/would include and a description of what National Register areas of significance apply (transportation and engineering) under National Register Criterion A<sup>6</sup>. The document defines railroad corridors as “the entire railroad right of way, not just the railroad bed or individual buildings. The railroad corridor as a historic district may be composed of many elements, including at minimum the railroad roadway (tracks, railroad bed, elevated or depressed grades, and ditches), and also contributing bridges, depots, and maintenance, operations, and commercial structures within railroad stations and yards” (Schmidt and Pratt 2007:5). It also laid out the other districts that could be nominated in addition to corridors: station historic districts, railroad yard historic districts, railroad grade separation structures, railroad depots, and so forth.

Aside from these types of “official stamps” of historic merit, I assert that rail trail development is inherently an act of historic preservation, regardless of the existence of artifacts of one sort or another along or within the corridor. John Jakle (1988: 4) called an abandoned railroad corridor a “450 mile historic district.” Preserving a corridor intact for reuse as a rail trail preserves the integrity of the rail line in the sense that it is not broken up into piecemeal properties and land uses. It also preserves the integrity of the line in the sense that it maintains a transportation use, albeit transportation of a different flavor. Marty Perry argues that “no other single event or resource had more historic impact in reshaping Kentucky’s cities and its economy than the arrival of railroads.... Thus, railroads are by definition historically significant, and usually retain enough

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<sup>6</sup> Sites, districts, or buildings “that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history” are included under Criterion A (National Park Service 2002).

material and spatial intactness to meet the test of integrity [referring to the National Register criteria]” (personal communication 8/08).

These corridors are significant not only for what they tell about the important place of the railroad in American communities but also as a document of engineering technology. Preservation of railroad corridors keeps a transportation route intact, but also maintains a story of engineering necessary to operate a railroad: a nearly flat grade accomplished often through a series of cuts, fills, bridges, trestles, tunnels, and route choices. It is not only the structures that are significant but the landscape manipulation as well.

This connection between historic preservation and railroad corridors was put to the test at a hearing before the Committee of Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials, U.S. House of Representatives (June 5, 2008). This hearing, held in response to a bill amendment reauthorizing funding for Amtrak, reviewed an amendment<sup>7</sup> that proposed railroads be exempted from Historic Preservation regulations in order to expedite repairs, maintenance, and delivery of service to railroad customers. Testifying at the hearing were representatives of the two railroad companies whose complaints prompted the introduction of the amendment, general counsel from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a representative from the National Council of State Historic Preservation Officers, a representative from the Rails to Trails Conservancy, and the Executive Director of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

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<sup>7</sup> This amendment was subsequently withdrawn, due most certainly in part to this hearing.

While all of these witnesses agreed that railroads are central to the American imagination and a core part of our economic, cultural, and geographic stories, they differed in their ideas about how the historic fabric should be treated and protected. One of the main differences was that railroad representatives believed that only certain elements of railroad operations should be deemed historic and not the corridors themselves, while those representing the historic preservation organizations and the trails group believed that the corridors are an essential part of the railroad whole. Elizabeth Merritt, General Counsel for the National Trust for Historic Preservation stated that,

given that the essence of the railroad both now and historically has been to connect one place to another, it is fitting that the corridors themselves – the connection as well as its inherent elements – are recognized as historically significant (Merritt 2008).

Representatives of the railroads argued that declaring entire active railroad corridors as eligible to the National Register presented “procedural, financial and legal obstacles to the continued operation of vital transportation services” (Simmons 2008). Thomas Brooks, VP for Projects and Chief Engineer of the Alaska Railroad went as far as to say that “the effect of expansively applied historical laws and regulations imperils our ability to maintain safety.” He went on to say that it limits a railroad’s ability to be a vital part of a state’s economy (Brooks 2008). These representatives used words like “mundane” to describe pieces of the railroad landscape such as bridges, culverts, signals, and sidings (Brooks 2008). Members of the historic preservation community commonly refer to items like these as “contributing features” of a historic district, features that may not be eligible to be nominated to the register on their own, but are important when

viewed collectively. This is an example of two competing and overlapping discourses talking about the same places with different words and different values for different ends.

A 2010 fundraising contest sponsored by American Express is another example of the way that rails to trails and historic preservation interests are working together more than ever. Non-profit groups in various categories (health and wellness, environment and wildlife, arts and culture, etc.) competed against one another to get the most votes from their supporters over a period of three months. The winners received a \$200,000 grant from American Express. Both the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Rails to Trails Conservancy competed fiercely for this money. As a member of both groups, I received relentless pleas via mail, email, and social networking sites to “vote today!” and assure their group’s place at the top. These two organizations were in the “Arts and Culture” category; the Rails to Trails Conservancy had to add a note of explanation to each correspondence explaining this. It read “Why ‘Arts & Culture?’ Because rail-trails, and the rail lines they’re built on, are an indelible part of our American landscape and heritage.” Over the course of the voting period each group was within five percentage points of the other; in the end American Express declared it a tie and awarded \$200,000 to each organization. In their press statements following the announcement, both the NTHP and the RTC extolled the virtues of the other group and confirmed their commitments to similar goals: preservation of heritage and historic landscapes, improving quality of life, and sustainable economic development. A member comment on the NTHP Facebook page following the win confirmed this sentiment. The question was “what’s next for historic preservation?” The member responded:



What's next is integration: with land conservation and with the overall design strategy for the built environment. I was glad to see the online contest for funds come out a 'draw' between NTHP and Rails to Trails -- people want both approaches. What's next is working together, rather than competing for scarce resources (NTHP Facebook page 6/17/10).

### **Transportation Enhancements: impact on rail trails and historic preservation**

Transportation Enhancements is a federal program that pays for non-highway transportation related projects. It is a reimbursement program that matches 80 percent to the sponsoring state or local government agency's 20 percent. Both rail trails and historic preservation projects are eligible for funding under the program and each of the three case studies in this project received transportation enhancement funding (at least once) that paid for some portion of its construction<sup>8</sup>.

Congress enacted the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991 as a response to a changing agenda within the Federal Highway Administration since the Interstate Highway System was effectively complete. In the words of the Secretary of Transportation at the time, Samuel Skinner, the act "will create jobs, reduce congestion, and rebuild our infrastructure. It will help maintain mobility. It will help State and local governments address environmental issues. Finally, it will ensure America's ability to compete in the global marketplace of the 21st Century" (Skinner, n.d.). A rather vague and wide sweeping statement, Secretary Skinner was referring to the way that the act addressed not only highway transportation, but intermodal transportation including

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<sup>8</sup> Muhlenberg County Rail Trail received two TE payments: \$213,956 for initial construction in 1999 and \$16,000 for installation of lights along one mile of trail in 2002. In 1999 Oldham County Greenway received TE funds in the amount of \$320,000 to pay for initial construction of .62 miles of trail in LaGrange and to purchase and restore the depot. It received an additional \$60,000 for rehabilitation of the depot in 2003. In 2006 the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary received TE funds to pay for trail construction, signage, and landscaping in the amount of \$1.1 million (this amount also went towards construction of other connecting trails from Swede Hollow, Indian Mounds Park, etc.).

mass transit, enhancements, safety improvement programs, intelligent transportation systems technology, and congestion mitigation programs.

One of the sub-programs of ISTEA was the Surface Transportation Program. This program directs federal funds to the states who then distribute the monies. The act allowed for greater discretion at the state level for how to spend federal dollars. This was a departure from past practice (Campbell 1996). Ten percent of these funds are designated for Transportation Enhancement uses: activities that are generally environment-related (Skinner, n.d.).

To receive TE funds, a project must fall under one of the following twelve categories.

1. Provision of pedestrian and bicycle facilities
2. Provision of bicycle and pedestrian safety and education programs
3. Acquisition of scenic or historic easements and sites
4. Scenic or historic highway programs including tourist and welcome centers
5. Landscaping and scenic beautification
6. Historic preservation
7. Rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures, or facilities
8. Conversion of abandoned railway corridors to trails
9. Control and removal of outdoor advertising
10. Archaeological planning and research
11. Environmental mitigation of highway runoff pollution, reduce vehicle-caused wildlife mortality, and maintain habitat connectivity
12. Establishment of transportation museums

In addition to falling under one of the twelve established categories, a project must have some demonstrated relationship to transportation. This can mean the project served transportation needs in the past, continues to serve them, or is somehow otherwise involved in or affected by transportation. States are allowed discretion to choose how they will determine which projects of which types will be funded; there is no federal prioritization system among the different categories.



Figure 2.6: Irvington Depot, Irvington, KY  
Funded under TE Category 7

In the language of the original ISTEA legislation, projects had to have a “direct link” to surface transportation but in the reauthorization as TEA-21, the language changed to projects had to be “related to” surface transportation. This subtle difference has a far reaching effect when it comes to which types of projects were eligible and how each state interpreted the guidelines. This revision impacted TE-funded historic

preservation projects in particular as more preservation projects were determined to be “related to” transportation even if they were not “directly linked” to transportation. Preservation projects funded under TE moved from the typical railroad depot or canal lock and dam to roadside taverns and even rural schools. The argument for funding roadside taverns under TE was based on taverns’ very existence dependent on their proximity to a road. The rural school argument was more tenuous: the decline of rural schools was precipitated by improvements in transportation and bussing (both of these examples are from Kentucky). The Federal Highway Administration released some guidance to state TE managers on this issue to help clarify the process (FHWA 2004a). They stated that that the following considerations can help confirm the relationship to surface transportation:

1. the project’s proximity to a highway or a pedestrian/bicycle corridor
2. whether the project enhances the aesthetic, cultural, or historic aspects of the travel experience, and
3. whether it serves a current or past transportation purpose.

Because states are allowed to decide how to allocate their TE funds and how to determine which applicants to award funding to, there is a wide variety in interpretation. Some states choose to require a more stringent link to transportation while others seem to be “stretching the link” (FHWA 2004a, Clements 2004). Current guidance in Kentucky states that “proximity to a highway or transportation facility alone is not sufficient to establish a relationship to surface transportation” (Kentucky Transportation Cabinet 2010). The guidelines go on to say that every application must establish the relationship of the project to surface transportation (Kentucky Transportation Cabinet 2008). Jan

Clements, retired director of TE programs in Kentucky, stated that the “biggest problem with the TE program is its flexibility” (2004).

In 1998 Congress reauthorized this legislation as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21). The TE program remained much as it was with a few refinements to guidelines and procedures. The major changes in this reauthorization concern the way the Federal-Aid Highway Program is funded within the federal budget, with TEA-21 providing for greater equity in funding as well as new guaranteed funding (Schweppe 2001).

The most recent reauthorization in 2005 was titled SAFTEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users).<sup>9</sup> One change made in SAFTEA-LU with specific regard to Transportation Enhancements was a clarification in the guidelines that says historic battlefields are eligible under the provision for acquiring scenic easements or scenic or historic sites (FHWA). Another change that is important to trail interests is the founding of a program called Safe Routes to School. This funding program helps local school districts improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities and safety for their students to be able to walk or bike to school. Another new program was the Non-motorized Transportation Pilot Program. This program exists to assist cities in connecting all of their transportation systems: transit, trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, and more. Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota is one of the four cities chosen as pilot locations. Funding for SAFTEA-LU extends through December 31, 2010 as part of the HIRE (Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment) act, but its future is currently tied up in negotiations over the next transportation reauthorization bill.

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<sup>9</sup> One can only imagine what the next one will be called!

## **Comparison of Minnesota and Kentucky Transportation Enhancement programs**

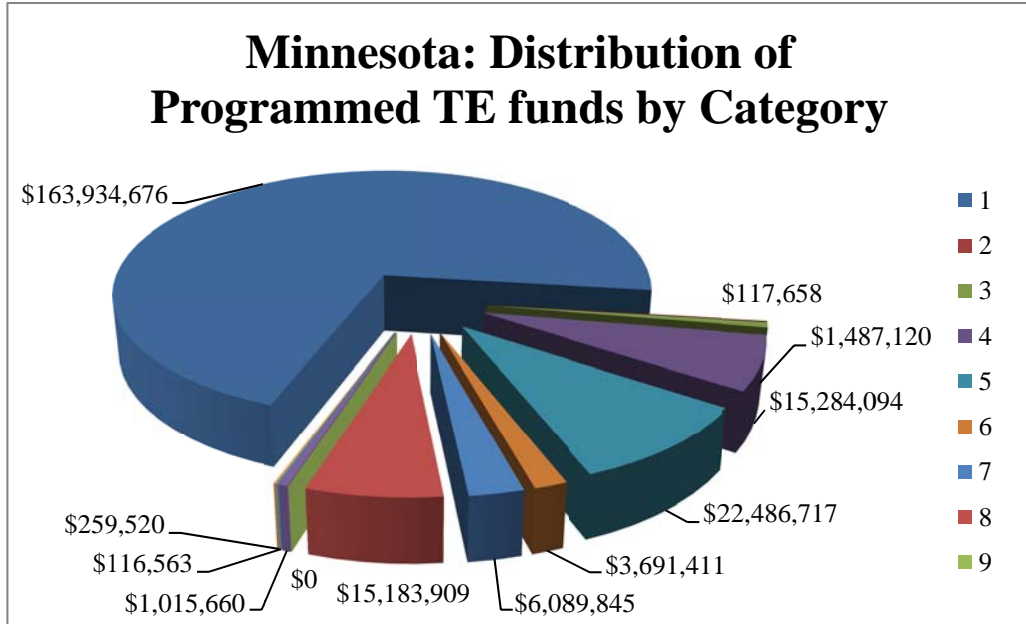
Minnesota and Kentucky have different ways of managing the transportation enhancement funding application process, though recent changes in Kentucky made the processes more similar. In Minnesota there is a state-level coordinator for transportation enhancement programs at the Minnesota Department of Transportation in the Office for Environmental Services, Cultural Resources Unit, but the process is quite decentralized. The Area Transportation Partnerships are the regional administrators of this program in Minnesota. The ATPs correspond to the eight MNDOT regions. They solicit applications, rank the applications, and select the funding winners. Membership on these partnership committees is made up of a mix of MNDOT engineers and planners, transit representatives, regional planners, local leaders such as mayors or county commissioners, and representatives from Native American communities, though most have transportation experience and not preservation experience (Chambers and Anderson 2005).

There are no state-wide guidelines or selection criteria that the ATPs must follow. Indeed, Mark Anderson, State TE Coordinator, related that there is resistance from the regional ATPs to the idea of central guidelines (2005). They like having the discretion to decide what to fund. Shawn Chambers (Supervisor within the MN DOT's Office of Investment Management) felt that this decentralized model led to greater participation in the transportation enhancement program; there was a greater feeling of ownership among the local partners (2005). Representative of this decentralized selection process, Chambers and Anderson directed me to look around for each ATP's selection criteria, "they should be online somewhere" (2005). They did not have copies readily available; I was able to find them for some regions but not for all. One district encourages applicants

to propose projects that are a part of larger transportation projects. Another district gives priority to projects that carry out parts of previously adopted area plans and many districts encourage projects with great public benefit and high quality design.

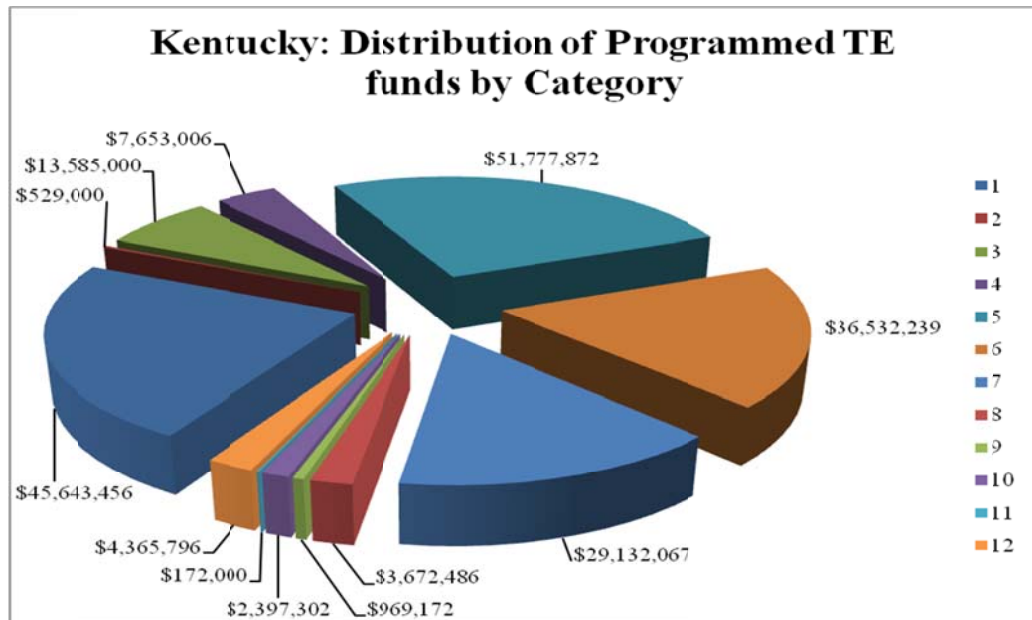
In Kentucky the TE program is within the state Transportation Cabinet in the Office of Local Programs (OLP) which is a division of the Department of Rural and Municipal Aid. The OLP is also home to the other SAFTEA-LU programs including Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality, Safe Routes to School, Transportation System and Community Preservation, and Scenic Byways/Highways programs. Project applications are reviewed within the OLP. From there, they go to Shane Tucker, Kentucky's TE coordinator, who then sends them to his director. The Secretary of the Transportation Cabinet and the Governor have approval authority. All projects are supposed to be sent to the Federal Highway Administration for final approval before awards are announced, but Mr. Tucker did not mention this step to me in his description of the process. This system corrects some past problems. The former system was one where applications went from state agencies (like the Kentucky Heritage Council) to the governor's office where they sometimes were awarded and announced without FHWA approval, which was problematic because the FHWA tends to have a narrower interpretation of eligibility than those responsible for selecting projects in Kentucky (Clements 2004).

Figure 2.7: Comparison of Minnesota and Kentucky Programmed TE Funds



Key to Categories

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ped/Bike facilities</li> <li>2. Ped/Bike safety and ed activities</li> <li>3. Acquisition of scenic or historic easements and sites</li> <li>4. Scenic or historic highway programs</li> <li>5. Landscaping and scenic beautification</li> <li>6. Historic preservation</li> <li>7. Rehab and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures or facilities</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Conversion of abandoned railway corridors to trails</li> <li>9. Inventory, control, and removal of outdoor advertising</li> <li>10. Archeological planning and research</li> <li>11. Environmental mitigation of runoff pollution and provision of wildlife connectivity</li> <li>12. Establishment of transportation museums</li> </ol> |
|---|--|





Some of the criteria that Kentucky TE reviewers use to evaluate projects include: a demonstrated need for the project, demonstrated transportation relationship, community support, a benefit to the community (through jobs, tourism, etc.), proof of matching funds, project readiness, cohesion with statewide, regional, or local plans, and an overall distribution of TE funds across the state and across all twelve funding categories (Kentucky Transportation Cabinet 2008). Shane Tucker said that the top three selection criteria were economic development impacts, need, and addressing safety issues (2009). A secondary criterion was distributing funds across projects from all regions of the state.

### **Accounting for differences in state TE programs**

The situations in the two states are practically opposite one another. Kentucky is characterized by a centralized administration, high up in the transportation cabinet and governor's office, with lots of influence and involvement from staff and leadership at the Kentucky Heritage Council (State Historic Preservation Office). In Minnesota the process is almost completely decentralized to the regions and administered by local MNDOT staff. The State Historic Preservation Office plays no official role in the process. Indeed, almost all of the professionals who have roles in the program come from transportation backgrounds. There is virtually no one involved who has historic preservation experience.

Officials at the Minnesota Department of Transportation explained the current situation as one of "momentum": the people running the program and the community groups applying for TE funds have experience with transportation projects and have seen success with trails. They continue to do what they know and what they know will succeed. Chambers and Anderson related that transportation officials are comfortable

with trails projects because they are like roads; you can count traffic the same way, the engineering is similar, and they are familiar to people. Related to this, they thought that local government sponsors (counties and towns, generally), are more willing to come up with the 20 percent match for the TE funds for a bike/pedestrian project because of the demonstrated track record of trail projects in Minnesota. Chambers and Anderson also said that there is a perception out there (likely unfounded) that historic preservation projects are more difficult to propose, get approved, and manage and that is why some local sponsors avoid them. In addition to the lack of experienced historic preservation people present in the process is the amount of participation by strong trails supporters. Not only does the MNDOT support trails, but trails in general in Minnesota enjoy strong financial and leadership support through their administration in the state Department of Natural Resources. Throughout the state the trails lobby is very organized and has many allies.

Another difference is that Minnesota awards more money per project but funds fewer projects. In Kentucky there are many small projects all over the state but fewer large ones. Jan Clements, former TE program director in Kentucky saw this as a function of the political system in Kentucky and a reflection of the relationships between the governor's office and supporters around the state. Another factor of difference between the two states is the sheer abundance of abandoned railroad corridors in Minnesota versus Kentucky; Minnesota has lost nearly 4,600 miles of railroad and Kentucky has lost around 1,300 (see table on page 14). In what may be a telling indication of the administration of Transportation Enhancements in Kentucky at the time (Proctor 2001), a booklet about TE produced by the Kentucky Heritage Council in cooperation with the

Kentucky Transportation Cabinet does not mention anywhere within it, even once, that projects need to be in some way related to surface transportation.

In Kentucky, from the start of TE funding in the 1990s the process has been concentrated at the top of state government and administration, not out in the local communities and regions. Even though Kentucky has an active and well developed system of Area Development Districts, they are not generally involved in the process like Minnesota's Area Transportation Partnerships are. Shane Tucker, current TE program coordinator in Kentucky stated that the reason the ADDs are not involved is because they are charged with helping all of the communities in their regions and don't want to have to choose to benefit one over another (Tucker 2009). From very early on the Kentucky Heritage Council (State Historic Preservation Office) was quite involved in proposing projects, in oversight, in public relations related to TE, and in communicating to the public about how to get funding and what can be funded. Currently, oversight has moved back into the Transportation Cabinet and the Heritage Council is only involved in Section 106 oversight for TE projects (Tucker 2009).

Two state level Kentucky Transportation Cabinet staff members (neither of whom work for the cabinet any longer) expressed to me on separate occasions that local community groups were told by the Kentucky Heritage Council that projects needed to include some aspect of historic preservation in order to be funded (including my case study in Oldham County). This is patently untrue under the federal eligibility guidelines from the Federal Highway Administration; this misinformation/manipulation was the source of much trouble from the Federal Highway Administration with the way Kentucky runs its program. None of my Kentucky case study contacts stated that this was the case,

but I did not ask them about it directly. I asked them about their interactions with the state and with KHC and neither mentioned historic preservation caveats. But, there are of course an unknown quantity of projects out there never proposed and never completed perhaps because of a perception that they would not qualify.

The majority of the oversight of the TE program came from Kentucky Heritage Council staff, the reverse of the Minnesota situation. One staff member at KHC was paid by the Transportation Cabinet to oversee the program. Other than a few staff members at the KYTC, there was little other notice from transportation offices of the program. It did not receive the support, staffing, funding, and publicity that it needed and deserved, in Jan Clements's opinion (2004).

The Oldham County Greenway project in LaGrange, Kentucky fits the model that this discussion puts forward for the state of Kentucky: a site with a historic preservation project as its centerpiece and a trail as an add-on. The Muhlenberg County Rail Trail example is the exception to Kentucky's seeming rule: it doesn't contain any historic preservation aspects in the TE funding. It is clear that the trends and averages are not predictive nor do they tell the story of every project. The Bruce Vento Sanctuary in St. Paul, with its attention to historic preservation and interpretation, does not seem to fit the Minnesota TE model, but the Transportation Enhancement funding went towards the construction of the trail and a small bit towards interpretive signage; they did not apply for funding under any of the historic preservation related categories. The project effort now to restore and adaptively reuse the historic industrial building has not been funded through TE (though it may in the future). The amount of TE funding this trail received is large, but not uncommon in the Minnesota context. Between 2004 and 2006 all rail trail

projects funded through TE received at least \$300,000 and many non-rail trail pedestrian/bike facility projects received upwards of \$775,000 each.

A thorough understanding of three foundations to this research: railroads, trails, and historic preservation will help the reader navigate the subsequent chapters. Rail trail developments like the ones we will examine in more detail through the case studies are part of a larger context of rising and falling railroad fortunes, shifting ideas about historic landscape preservation, and recreation around the US. This chapter outlined some of the important characters in the rail, trail, and preservation stories both at the national level and for my case studies. Next, the discussion turns to an examination of the relevant literatures that support this research. These literatures are in both geography and in historic preservation, with particular attention to the connections between the two fields. Following the theoretical foundations, chapter five will discuss the case studies in detail.

### **Chapter 3 : Contexts and legacies: frameworks for research**

This chapter traces the contexts and legacies within which this research is built. These contexts are within humanistic and critical cultural geography and also historic preservation literatures. Values-based preservation theory and method provides the bridge between these lines of inquiry. The overarching goals of this project were to discover, through the three case studies, how people and their communities value and revalue historic landscapes and to examine how students of those places can come to know those values and implement them in creating historic preservation and recreation projects that resonate with the communities in which they are located. The frameworks for this research provide a basis for the following questions: why is it a worthwhile endeavor to ask these types of questions? Why should geographers or historic preservation professionals or trail planners care about values? The next chapter on methodologies will move from the “whys” to the “hows.”

#### **Humanistic geography and critical theory**

The idea of endeavoring as a humanistic geographer resonated with me early in my research because the stories people tell about themselves in and through their places are so compelling. Any place, any person – set into context unfolds a rich, layered story that tells us of what is valued. The stories I explore surrounding these three landscapes of historic preservation and recreational re-valuation are both the stories of individuals and the stories of the contexts within which they operate.<sup>10</sup> I cannot tell one story without the other. Humanistic geography allows me to address both with a satisfying depth.

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<sup>10</sup> These contexts include local/state/national government, citizens groups, non-profits, local economic and cultural situations, to name a few.

Humanistic geography is difficult to characterize as a unified whole (Entrikin 2001). Its practitioners draw from many diverse philosophies, methodologies, and humanist thinkers of the past, but they do share a common principle: “bringing human beings in all of their complexity to the centre-stage of human geography” (Cloke et al. 1991: 58). Humanistic geography seeks to understand the human world by studying people’s “geographical behavior as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place” (Tuan 1976).

The other uniting theme of humanistic geography was its disenchantment with positivist and empiricist scholarly practice (Daniels 1985). Some of the focal points of study were landscape iconography, mental maps, environmental perception, and everyday geographies. Questions central to humanistic geography were “what is the nature of human experience? How do place, landscape, and space define and provide context to this experience? How do humans make the world into a home?” (Adams, et al. 2001: xv). In geography, “humanistic geography” came to refer to “the study of meaning and experience and the move beyond the traditional concern with linking concepts to their referents toward an interest in relating meaning to subjects” (Entrikin and Tepple 2006: 33). J.B. Jackson and his keen eye for examining everyday landscapes was an important influence on humanistic geography in the 1970s. It was Jackson’s attention to landscape’s symbolic meanings and expressions of collective beliefs that define the humanistic geographical enterprise (Wylie 2007).

Methodologically, most humanistic geographers shared a use of participatory/experiential fieldwork; in particular, participant observation in order to understand people’s lived experiences in places (Daniels 1985, Johnston 1997, Rowles

1978). Many humanistic geographers also utilized analysis of visual and written texts and the landscape (Johnston 1997, Adams, et al. 2001).

Critiques of humanistic geography stated that there was too much emphasis on the individual actor in place and no regard for the influence of external structures and systems. Marwyn Samuels (1979), however, demonstrates a definite understanding of the way places are created through the interplay of “author and context,” the individual and the structural. He protests theories and methods that write out the role of the individual in place making saying that “unless we are prepared to accept our own irrelevance, we require a logic and a method prepared to assert the decisive role of the individual in the making and meaning of the landscape” (Samuels 1979: 60). He continues by arguing that the “biography of landscape,” the full story of a place, is incomplete without “the authors and their meanings in the context;” the two cannot be separated (1979: 63).

Methodologically, he says that these meanings can be learned by asking people in interviews and discussions, by listening, and by examining their records and documents. Critics recognize that Samuels acknowledges the role of external structures and not just individuals in shaping landscapes, but say that he still presents a “virtually institutionless world” where even the most marginalized still retain an ability to shape their world (Pred 1984: 279).

Geographers continue to work in this tradition but very few refer to it as humanistic geography anymore. Adams et al. (2001: xvi) call new practices in this tradition “critical humanist geographies.” They define this as not a rejection of humanistic geography, but a “maturation” in which researchers continue to pursue the study of everyday lived experiences, individual understandings of physical, social, and



symbolic contexts, and how places are constructed but now include influence from contemporary social theories such as feminism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and others (Adams, et.al 2001).

Humanistic geography was critiqued for its narrow definition of human subjectivity, one that ignored social dimensions (Daniels 1985). The progression into a critical humanistic geography is characterized by a focus on multiplicity of places instead of a quest for universal human experiences or essences of places. Critical humanistic geographers acknowledge the role of outside and large scale structures in place and identity making, not just human agency (Adams, et.al 2001, Cloke, et al. 1991).

Though few would acknowledge ties to a humanistic tradition, some current research does embody some of the principles of humanistic approaches for studying places alongside contributions from critical theory on the ways that meanings in place are contested and negotiated. (Adams et al. 2001). The endeavor to understand place meanings is carried out through an exploration of the different meanings that intersect in place, leading to a more nuanced understanding of what that place has meant and continues to mean to those who experience it.

It seems like humanistic geography, as an approach, was hampered by not having a well-developed practice. By this I mean that many of the writings were on what humanistic geography could or should address, but not how one could carry it out (e.g. Tuan 1976, Buttimer 1976, Meinig 1983, though see Ley and Samuels 1978 for some exceptions). Of course, it could never have a set of “rules for practice;” that would contradict the spirit of the pursuit in the first place, but there was not really a developed

idea of theory and method for the pursuit of understanding place experiences (Samuels 1979).

### **Landscape and place**

This section will discuss the dual concepts of landscape and place, give a brief genealogy of their usage in geographic inquiry, and explain how these concepts are defined and deployed in this dissertation. Landscape has been a central concern of geographic inquiry since Carl Sauer's influential scholarship in the 1920s (Duncan 1990, Schein 1997). Sauer's Berkeley School of cultural landscape survey encouraged study of migration, diffusion, and delineating regional culture areas – a rather scientific study of material culture (Groth 1997, Duncan 1990, Johnston, et al. 2000). Later cultural geographers criticized Sauer's approach as reifying culture, removing individual action from the understanding of culture (a "superorganic" concept of culture, Duncan 1980). Humanistic geographers' return to studies of place experience was in opposition to positivist approaches, which, ironically, characterized these earlier landscape studies (Cosgrove 1985).

A debate centered upon these issues: on the one hand, Sauerian cultural landscape studies were criticized for their superorganic approach, leaving out the possibility of human agency. On the other hand, humanistic approaches were criticized for assigning too much agency to the human authors of landscapes. The mediation of these two perspectives is the idea that there cannot be one or the other, structures and authors are co-implicated in the making of places and each other (Schein 1997). Duncan and Duncan (2001: 389) argue that geography has moved too far towards examining "individual human agency, autonomy and intentionality" and it should again focus more on systems

of hegemonic inequalities and social justice issues, evidence that the mediation between these two points of view is ongoing.

Landscape and place are sometimes spoken of in the same ways: as sites of meaning and connection, as material, as texts (Schein 1997, Meinig 1979). Indeed, they often define each other as in Sauer's classic definition of the cultural landscape which included the statement "the essential character of a place" (Hayden 1997, citing Sauer 1925). In humanistic geography place was the major focus of inquiry as the site of human experience. One of the critiques lodged against humanistic geography was that there was much discussion on the principles it espoused but little discussion of how to practice it or what a study based on these principles may look like (Daniels 1985, Relph 1981). In critical human geography the idea of place has become a strong focus as an "open-ended and porous entity," nodes where multiple local, national, and international meanings intersect (Barnes and Gregory 1997: 294). Landscapes (or places) are understood as socially constructed through the renegotiation of contested meanings and mutually constitutive of the identities and power systems of those groups who create them (Duncan 1990). This dissertation treats landscapes as places and refers to them as such. This is because in geography both landscapes and places are described as intersections of meaning, both result from social constructions, both are ways of understanding our worlds (Barnes and Gregory 1997, Cresswell 2004). Scholars of place speak often of the meanings in and connections to landscapes in the same way they speak of the meanings in and connections to places (Clay 1980, Hayden 1995). It is for these reasons that I conflate the two words.

Place, along with space, has been called the core of geographic study (Tuan 1977, Adams, et. al 2001). In the humanistic tradition, the meaning and experience of places is a central focus. Place is considered a “space meaningful for [people]” (Houston 1978: 224). But it has a paradoxical nature: it seems like a solid concept, but it can have so many meanings all focused simultaneously. Places are at once material *and* symbolic and “cannot be reduced to the concrete *or* the ‘merely ideological’” (Cresswell 1996: 13, emphasis added).

Place is a confusing concept because it has been thought of in so many different ways in geography (Hayden 1995, Agnew 1993). It has had locational connotations – area, locality; it has referred to types of places – city, state, village; it has suggested territorial meanings – home, turf, community; and it has had metaphorical meanings – social status, or relative position (Harvey 1993, Hayden 1995).

Place is a context for social relations, but has been conflated with community, which is not always the case. Community can happen without any ties to place, and neighbors living in a place often share no characteristics of community other than proximity. Place is not merely the “backdrop” to social processes, it is a part of them (Agnew 1993, Godkin 1980, Entrikin 1991).

During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, geographic inquiry focused on studying places either for the purpose of forming generalizable rules about morphology or to examine the particularities of unique places. Both of these pursuits shared the idea that places had some kind of fundamental nature that could be discovered and analyzed when viewed from the outside (Barnes and Gregory 1997). Humanistic geography countered

this in the 1970s with an approach that studied places from the inside, believing that places were subjectively and personally experienced. Beginning in the 1980s, social theoretical debates in geography contended that places were not just subjective but were shaped by outside influences and systems of power as well (the issue of structure and agency). Developing from this were Post-structural views that place has no single essence, but is instead a “locus of myriad external relations,” where the constructed identities of people are shaped by numerous local and global forces (Barnes and Gregory 1997: 294).

Adams, et al. (2001) identifies three themes for interpreting place in contemporary geographic scholarship. The first is experience and identity, or exploring the meanings in places. The second is imagination and social construction, or the idea that places are socially produced by a variety of discourses that intersect there. The third idea is one of paradox and modernity, or the idea that places are dynamic, fluid and have a contested and constantly renegotiated character (Adams et. al 2001).

The first of these frameworks, the idea that one can explore the meanings of places through experience and identity, has perhaps the longest history in geography. This pursuit became most focused during the 1970s as humanistic geography developed in opposition to the positivistic and strongly quantitative practice in the discipline through the 1960s. The heart of humanistic approaches was that places are centers of meaning to humans (Godkin 1980, Tuan 1976, Entrikin 1991). Extending from this is the idea that people can form a link to places, an “affective bond” that Tuan calls “topophilia” (Tuan 1974). Bound up in the idea of a bond to a place is the idea that place anchors identity; it

is a component of both our social and personal identities (Buttimer 1980, Entrikin 1991, 1997, Duncan and Duncan 2001).

The second framework for studying place outlined by Adams, et. al suggests the way that places are socially constructed and imagined. Places have no inherent meanings. Meanings emerge through the context of social relations focused there; place making is a “shared endeavor” (Blokland 2001: 270). Places are foundations for relationships, identities, and memories, but all of these things are mutually constitutive (Sack 1993, Hayden 1995, Blokland 2001).

The third framework through which we can study place recognizes the dynamic and multiple nature of place. We speak of collective memories or collective identities bound to places, but place identity is always contested and it is far from collective (Withers 1996). Massey proposes a “progressive” sense of place, one that conceives of place as fluid and enmeshed, always “becoming.” Places cannot be essentialized or bounded and are not just intrinsically invested with meaning or identity that can be perceived by all (Massey 1993, 1994, Cresswell 1996). Places are tied in infinite ways to other places and influences which serve to create place identities as much as any distinctive qualities and histories of specific places (Massey 1993, Barnes and Gregory 1997, Entrikin 1997). Massey envisions places as interconnected nodes in a web of experiences, “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (1993:66).

## **Meaning, value, memory, and identity**

### **Meaning/ Value**

Meaning is as important as place as part of the geographical pursuit. Post-structural and other contemporary social theoretical approaches to geography focus on the multiple, shifting, and socially constructed nature of meaning in place. Humanistic approaches focused strongly on examining experience and meaning in place, but are less reflective on the multiple meanings possible in place and the opportunity for significant contestations of meaning (Barnes and Gregory 1997).

An underlying assumption is that meanings are constituted in the material world and that these meanings, however many, can be discerned (Withers 1996, Sack 1993). Interpreting the meaning of places involves interpreting the meanings conferred and understood by people and groups who use, create, and change those places (Gibson 1978). Because, ultimately, it is people who “invest places with social and cultural meaning” (Hayden 1995: 78). Meaning is found in the interaction of place and identity (Adams et. al 2001).

This interaction of place and identity implies that there is almost never one uniform meaning held by all. Meanings in place are contested and negotiated by those who experience them (Duncan 1990). The struggle or negotiation can provide new or different meanings (Withers 1996). But it is important to remember that these negotiations are not necessarily (even rarely) fair among all the stakeholders. Issues of power are necessarily tied to meanings that are associated with places – the “official” meanings, the ones expressed in the built environment, the meanings experienced by

people in their everyday lives in agreement with or resistance to meanings expressed by others (Withers 1996, Peet 1996).

One can think of value and meaning as linked concepts; they are in many cases used interchangeably when speaking about what matters to people – the connections people have to a place or the position a place holds in the lives of those who experience it. An organizing concept of my research is the idea of “values in place.” This is the idea that the sets of beliefs about what is important are expressed on the landscape by the groups and people who have a role in shaping it. The other sense of value is central as well: values are assigned to places as people use them and they become a part of their everyday world. My research is primarily concerned with exploring the intangible values relating to meaning, quality of life, preservation of a historic landscape, and appreciation of nature and community, but other senses of tangible value are often assigned to rail trails: economic, tourism, or health benefit value.

Two things are implied by value which is both a noun and a verb: one may value something by placing a worth on it or one may have values, the set of beliefs about what is important to a person. Both of these senses of value are valid in geographic study. Ley and Samuels (1978) write that the intention of humanistic geography is to uncover human values, especially as related to places. Buttner (1974) addresses in great detail what values mean to geography, but not how to explore people’s values in place. Instead, she writes of how to examine one’s own values as a geographer in doing geographical study, and the ways that values enter into research and practice. Values were once seen as something dangerous and to be avoided in good empirical science (and avoiding them was seen as possible, as well).



Once again, the ideas that help us understand place and meaning, help us to understand value. It is socially constructed, mutually constitutive along with the others; it is shifting, and multiple across time, space, and among groups. Things that people value in the landscape shape social relations and social relations shape values (Duncan and Duncan 2001). Values change over time (sometimes very quickly, sometimes quite slowly) and these changes are reflected in the landscape as places are valued, devalued, and revalued (Carter-Park and Coppack 1994). Value, like meaning, is not inherent in a place. It can change and must be created in the first place by those who interact with the place (DeLyser 1999). It seems to be true that especially when faced with loss or rapid change, places' values increase (DeLyser 1999, Glassberg 2001). Value is articulated in place through landscapes. Marking places in an official way, or recognizing important everyday sites of memory, "makes places visible by linking what ordinarily cannot be seen – a community's values and reminiscences, its history – to features in the physical environment" (Glassberg 2001: 124).

I use the word "value" interchangeably with the word "meaning" throughout this dissertation. In my experiences of interviewing local trail users and leaders, they responded positively and extensively to questions about "how do you (or the community) value this place?" versus the more nebulous "what does this place mean to you?" In interviews, my notes prompted me to ask people what places meant to them, but it was always translated through my Minnesota vernacular verbal filter and came out in conversation as "what do you value about this place?" Or "how is it important in your community?" This usage was more natural and universal and became the primary. Some

participants used the word meaning independently of my prompting or questions and in those cases I would follow their lead.

## **Memory**

“Memory” is closer to the way that people experience the past than is “history,” which is perceived as something long ago, only read about in books and studied in school, not lived and retold in everyday life (Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998). In the interplay between personal and public memory people often convert public events into personal remembrance with ties to personal experiences (Lowenthal 1985, 1989). For the purposes of my research, I will be focusing on public memory rather than personal memories.

Memory, like meaning, is a constructive activity that happens in social relationships (Radley 1982, Lowenthal 1989). This idea is inherent in the concept of public memory. A shared history or public memory has “elements of a past remembered in common as well as elements forgotten in common” (Glassberg 2001). Collective remembering is not so much the fact that group members all can remember an event or place, but that they remember and retell the stories together as a group (Blokland 2001). Public memories are not just the opposite of official memories; it is important to recognize that there are deep connections between them (Till 1999).

Memory is crucial to our sense of identity (Lowenthal 1985, Hayden 1995). We determine who we are in part through past experiences, both personal and shared. Not only is memory constitutive of identity, it is also intimately tied to meaning and place (Withers 1996). Memory is supported and triggered by places (Hayden 1995, Radley 1982), but places are articulations of memory, and landscape depends, at least in part, on

memory for its creation (Withers 1996, Johnson 1994, 1996, Entrikin 1997). Till writes that social memory is the process by which “myths and values” can be “mapped” onto the world by a society (Till 2001:275). Blokland (2001) found that actual places became the foundations for shared memories, as collective remembering began in recalling places and events in place. This served as a base for constructing new social relations among new acquaintances or in strengthening bonds among “insiders” who shared places and memories in common. Memory, place, and one’s sense of history are all inextricably intertwined:

The memory of a place becomes a language through which we recall our past social networks and emotions. We remember places as the settings for past social experience and these places, as we remember them, can have even more emotional impact on us than our experience of them at the time (Glassberg 2001: 115).

Just like meanings and sense of place, memory is not inherent or essential based on group membership, but is instead shifting, with multiple meanings, and is sensitive to context (Withers 1996). Even shared experiences are remembered differently by members of a group. Local contestations over how the past is remembered often reflect national debates, as well as incorporating local concerns and factors (Johnson 1994, 1995, 1996). The process of remembering (and re-remembering) revalues and devalues things and places as their meanings are reinterpreted through the changing contexts of the present (Radley 1982). Places of memory, whether official or everyday, remain active over time as sites of meaning construction even if their original purpose has come to an end (DeLyser 1999, 2001). Memory transforms the past; it focuses the past through a process of screening things out. Lowenthal writes, “Memory not only conserves the past but adjusts recall to current needs. Instead of remembering exactly what was, we make

the past intelligible in the light of present circumstances” (1975: 27). This process of re-forming the past circles back to place through the mutually constitutive relationship between place and memory. We reshape landscapes to conform to our reshaped ideas of the past as we save, restore, and make new places, but these new or reformed places also serve to further shape us and our memories and identities in place (Lowenthal 1975, 1989).

In the same way that meaning is mediated through structures of power that come together in a place, memory can also become naturalized (Hoelscher 1998, Dwyer 2000). These structures become embedded in the place and memories tied to it in a way that they become stabilized and masked, though this is not always and everywhere the case (Duncan and Duncan 2001, 1988). The process of working out new meanings and re-remembering comes through the confrontation of the dominant meanings with alternative or contested meanings.

In geography these ideas about memory are discussed primarily through the contexts of memorials, monuments, and museums, not everyday places or “memory places” (Glassberg 2001: 157). The key connection that I addressed in my research is the way that memory and values are anchored in place. Memory places are material expressions of discourses (Till 1999) or as Schein puts it: discourses materialized (1997). This can apply to officially designated places or those that over time become important places in a community. Glassberg (1996) emphasizes that everyday landmarks of social life and remembering are important to collective memory and place as well as officially designated landmarks. Hayden (1995) too remarks that social memory is evoked in preserved and designated monuments, but it is also powerfully present in everyday

places. “Urban landscapes are storehouses for these social memories, because natural features such as hills or harbors, as well as streets, buildings, and patterns of settlement, frame the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes” (Hayden 1995: 9)

I had to translate the insights of the geographic work centered on monuments and memorials to historic preservation and everyday special places. There is an even closer correspondence between monuments and “iconic” historic preservation projects such as the homes of famous statesmen or sites of national significance. In the case of locally significant historic sites such as railroad corridors and depots, the contested place meanings and values are no less important or evident, just operating on a smaller scale. The processes still share key similarities in that they are acts of collective remembrance mapped onto places – decisions have to be made regarding what will be remembered in what manner and who will participate in the remembering.

It is difficult to compare some of the ideas presented in research on memorials to historic preservation projects because the nature of the remembrances is so different even though the activities may be similar (for example, the preservation of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s childhood home). Most of the memorials discussed in geographic literature address tragic, violent, or contentious pasts, tied up with personal loss and community pain (e.g. Auschwitz: Charlesworth 1994; the Holocaust: Till 1999; the Civil Rights Movement: Dwyer 2000; the 1798 Irish Rebellion: Johnson 1994; the Civil War and contemporary race relations in the South: Hodder 1999). In my case studies, the public memories tied to the places are much more commonly positive: memories of railroad days, for example.

Social memory, collective memory, and public memory are referred to in the same way, though some authors differentiate nuanced meanings to the different phrases. I use the term public memory in this study. Steven Hoelscher defines public memory as “the body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a society or group make sense of its past, and future” (1998: 372). Our memories are distinctly individual but we attach them to collective stories of the “remembered past” to create deeper meaning and connection (Lowenthal 1985). Geographers have focused mainly on monuments, memorials, and museums as places where public memory is articulated (Johnson 1994, 1996; Dwyer 2000; Till 1999, 2001; Withers 1996; Peet 1996). Exploration of expressions of memory is seen as a way to study social change, to examine how dominant ideas are embedded in places and public memories, and to learn how discourses are both embedded in and contested in places (Till 1999, Hoelscher 1998, Johnson 1994). Illustrating the depth of connection between the concepts, Lowenthal calls landscape “the seat of collective memory” (1997: 180).

### **Identity**

Identity and public memory are dependent on each other for their creation; identity depends on renegotiating contested meanings and memories and public memory is shaped through the identities of those who remember from the present (Withers 1996, Lowenthal 1985). In the same way, landscape and identity are mutually dependent and mutually constitutive. Landscapes are not just a “backdrop,” they play an active role in framing social life, values, and identities (Duncan and Duncan 2001: 387). Like landscape, identity is fluid, multiple, and contested but people still try to “stabilize” identities and “anchor them in place” (Duncan and Duncan 2001: 391). Places reveal the

meanings and identities of those who live and act there and the way that these meanings are “rewritten and reread” (Johnson 1994).

Identity studies came to the fore in geography within critical theories such as feminism, post-colonialism, and post-structuralism (among others) in the 1980s and ‘90s. These studies focused on the construction, maintenance, and contestation of identity and the way it is performed (Del Casino and Hanna 2000). While drawing on many identity theorists from the humanities and social science, geographers “pushed these identity theorists to ‘spatialize’ their theories” (Gallaher 1997: 256). Here the ideas about how construction of identity and construction of place are interdependent processes were explored.

The concepts of landscape (or place), value, social memory, and identity are “inextricably intertwined” (Glassberg 2001: 8); historic preservation exists at the intersection of identity, memory, and place. How do historic preservation professionals address these issues of memory and identity in the context of the values people have of places? One way is through “values-based preservation.” The next section explores this concept and its ties to the cultural geographical traditions.

### **Values-based preservation and the intersection of geographical and historic preservation literatures**

Values-based preservation is both a theory and a method. Values-based preservation (also called values-centered preservation) “acknowledges the multiple, valid meanings of a particular place. It acknowledges their multiplicity, their changeability, and the fact that values come from many different sources” (Mason 2006). It is a way of describing how historic preservation practice can assess community values relating to

places and incorporate those values in every step of the planning process as historic places are defined, restored, redeveloped, and used. The three basic principles of values based preservation are: 1) decisions are based on people's/groups' values for place, 2) decisions are reached by prioritizing some values over others, and 3) planners have to know what these values are and who holds them (Mason 2003).

While it is hardly an earth-shattering idea (that planners should find out what the community values), it is a very different approach than traditional historic preservation practice has taken in the past. Traditional practice in historic preservation was characterized by a top-down, experts-only view of decision making. Officials, historians, and preservation boards decide what is historic, what is not, how it should be developed and interpreted, and how it should be used. This is based on the premise that historic value is inherent in sites and structures, that significance resides naturally in a historic place. The idea that a site's value could be a social construction was not considered. Increasingly in preservation practitioners are turning to place theories that acknowledge "the memories, ideas, and other social motivations that drive the urge to physically preserve the built environment" (Mason 2003: 68).

Many refer to The Burra Charter (1979) as one of the first official documents to advocate for a values-centered approach in historic preservation. This document, released by Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), laid out models for a participatory planning process and also suggested that a primary goal of preservation should relate to "cultural significance" and not just material sites or objects (Mason 2006, Australia ICOMOS 1999). In the most recent revision of this document, "cultural significance" is defined thus: "aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual



value for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the *place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects* [italics in original]. Places may have a range of values for different individuals or groups (p. 2).” The Burra Charter has served as a model for other historic preservation plans around the world. Especially important has been the process in the charter that outlines the importance of (and how to do) researching the actual values associated with a place by asking those in the community who value it.

The Getty Conservation Institute<sup>11</sup> was also instrumental in supporting research on “values and economics of cultural heritage” (Avrami, et al 2002: 3). These values included cultural values, economic values, and environmental values. An ongoing project brought together specialists from various fields to study the issue of values in heritage conservation. Three reports were published as a result of this project; one addressed economic issues in heritage preservation (Mason 1998), the second addressed issues that needed attention (Avrami, et al 2000), and the third addressed the idea of values and some methodological approaches (de la Torre 2002). These reports are oft cited in subsequent publications that apply values-based preservation methods and theories.

Randall Mason, a professor in the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Design, is one of the key figures in the delineation of values-based preservation theories and methods (Mason 1998, 2003, 2006, 2008; Avrami, Mason, and de la Torre 2000; Weiner and Mason 2006). So it is not

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<sup>11</sup> From their document (2002): “The Getty Conservation Institute works internationally to advance conservation and to enhance and encourage the preservation and understanding of the visual arts in all of their dimensions – objects, collections, architecture, and sites. The Institute serves the conservation community through scientific research; education and training; field projects; and the dissemination of the results of both its work and the work of others in the field.”

surprising that several recent theses that discuss values-based preservation have been written by his students (Ruedig 2007, Farah 2009). In one of the first publications to address values based preservation as both a theory and a method in opposition to the status quo in preservation practice, Mason wrote that,

Values-centered theory ... acknowledges the dynamics of preservation and allows us to model (if not solve) the reality of the multiple, contested, and shifting values ascribed to historic preservation sites and projects. It is a body of theory that leads, in practice, to a significance concept that is flexible and multivalent, instead of an older model that succeeded best in placing buildings and sites 'under glass,' segregated from society like museum objects (2003: 70).

In this dissertation, Mason's work is the device for connecting geographical inquiry with historic preservation and transportation planning theory and practice.

Many historic preservation organizations around the world have embraced a values-based preservation. In particular, Canada, the UK, and Australia/New Zealand see widespread use of this method. In practice "the former 'old' buildings-related focus has been replaced by a values-centered methodology which promotes 'places' that are associated with a range of qualities (archaeological, architectural, cultural, etc) and a wide range of types of places (sites, structures, areas, archaeological sites, etc)" (McClellan and Greig 2007:19).

In practice, values-based preservation features expanded and deliberate outreach to local stakeholders in both project planning and interpretation to promote "socially inclusive...public history and urban preservation" (Hayden 1996: 12). Ethnographic methods combined with public meetings or design charrettes are common approaches used to ask what people value about their communities and envision for their historic places (Ketz 2009, Low 2002, Jonker and Cook 2007). The role of the expert is not

erased in values-based preservation. It is still essential that facilitators be present to elicit values from the public but also people who question the process rigorously asking: Who isn't speaking? Whose values aren't being heard? Or, whose values are being subjugated by the predominant public values? (Ketz 2009, Spennemann 2006). Beyond collecting this information, the most important step is incorporating it into projects and using it to shape the outcomes. These places, shaped by public input, will go on in turn to shape future perceptions of those places (or of historic places in general).

Values-based preservation is an appropriate framework to apply to case studies like mine. The three case studies in this project include views of the process at three different places on the values-based preservation (or planning) spectrum. The Vento site is far to one end: this process was driven almost entirely by the community's values for recreation, the environment, and preservation. The Oldham County example is somewhere in the middle – the community values recreation and connections and historic landscapes, but the process was still driven mostly by a committed small group of advocates. The Muhlenberg County example is one from the other end of the spectrum. Very little was done in the way of investigating what the community valued about the place, and in fact there was quite a bit of vocal community opposition to the trail project. But in the end, after the project was built, it became a very important and valuable place in the community. Values-based preservation helps especially with thinking of how what I learned through these case studies can be of use to future trails and historic preservation planners. It highlights the effectiveness of this theory/method and the worth of discerning what it is that the public values and incorporating those values into the planning process and the final project alike. In terms of frameworks and lineages, values based

preservation is an effective way to see how many of the ways geographers have been studying places works in a practical application like historic preservation and trails planning.

### **Reconciling values-based preservation with the geographic literature**

Values-based preservation reflects, and grew from, many of the core ideas from cultural geography, particularly studies on place meanings. Preservation researchers describe how the significance of historic places is “made, not found” in the way that geographers describe how place meanings are constructed socially, and how landscapes have a role in both shaping culture and being shaped by culture (Mason 2003:66).

Cultural geographers began “questioning [landscape’s] status as a material thing” and turned their attention from just the material forms and patterns of the cultural landscape to the symbolic meanings held within these places – the meanings held by those who formed them, the meanings conveyed to users/views, and the way these meanings shaped those who encountered the places (Riesenweber 2008: 26). While Mason is trained as a geographer, many of the historic preservation professionals who embrace values based preservation in practice (both with that name and without) do not share a cultural geography tradition. Many professionals have employed values-based preservation practices without calling them such or even being aware of such an approach.

Historic preservation literature and practice are beginning to draw on the geographical debates on the social construction of place and identity (Tomlan 1999, Hayden 1995). This is particularly true in the case of determining historical significance. In historic preservation practice, “significance is shorthand for the meanings of a place,

and the ways a place is made useful” (Mason 2003). Statements of significance are the primary piece of historic preservation practice. This statement contains clues to a preservationist’s “theory, ideology and politics” in addition to the reasons why he or she thinks a site is in need of preservation or important (Mason 2003). In order for a structure or landscape to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, a statement of significance must be drafted which situates the site’s significance in one of four criteria for evaluation (National Register of Historic Places 2002, see Box 2.2 on p. 30). Criterion A refers to sites that are “associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history”. Criterion B refers to places that “are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past”. Criterion C relates to structures that “embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.” And Criterion D is used mostly in cases of archeological sites. It states that the site “has yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.”

Currently, the National Register language states “the quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.” This statement implies that significance resides in places and artifacts inherently; one only needs to identify it (Perry 2004). The nature of these criteria is such that significance and integrity are *the* guiding principles of historic preservation. A structure that retains original workmanship, materials, and “feeling” but that has been moved, even across the street, from its original

location is deemed to not possess integrity of location and therefore ineligible for listing on the National Register (Tyler 2000). This same building may have immense significance locally or even on a wider scale in terms of its meaning to residents as a place of memory or site of important historical events. Though these criteria are not rigid laws, they are typically interpreted in this strict manner. Their problematic potential is being debated among historic preservationists, but alternatives are not forthcoming.

This way of thinking about significance fixes meaning at one point in time, one point of view with no room to re-evaluate (or re-value) a site over time (Mason 2003). The idea that significance is tied to integrity is one key piece of meaning that the preservation community holds but this is something that most people outside of that community don't think about. Instead, the popular view of significance is tied to memory, of the association of places with personal or community memories.

Riesenweber (2008) summarizes this by saying

As the narratives historic preservation constructs and materializes shape our view of the past, it accomplishes social reproduction by legitimizing landscapes that reinforce certain views of the past and elide others...Historic preservation is thus a powerful process for designing landscapes that, while they form the 'taken-for-granted' settings of daily life, silently engage in shaping who we are (p. 32).

Current debate in historic preservation has begun to address the idea that significance is inherent and counter it with ideas that significance, as well as authenticity, are socially constructed, not intrinsic qualities of things that are spatially and temporally fixed (Green 1999, Barthel 1996, Hoelscher 1998, Mason 2003, Riesenweber 2008).

We can conceive of historic preservation as a discourse that is materialized on the landscape through various structures such as zoning or National Register historic districts

and designations (Schein 1997). The landscape normalizes what is contained in these supporting discourses (local or national regulations) and in turn structures expectations and ideas about what “historic” should look and be like and how it is to be valued (Schein 1997). Riesenweber writes that it would be useful to understand the role of historic preservation as a social group itself, one that has specific values, meanings, and ideas that the rest of the world isn’t likely to share. Indeed, “the preservation movement itself is socially constructed” (Riesenweber 2008: 29).

Historic preservation is a discourse that socially constructs the boundaries of significance (for one example) which in turn shape historic preservation as practiced. Very little of the preservation literature attends to these debates, though there is certainly a recognition that the framing ideology that drives historic preservation has changed over the years. What began as a concentration on nationally significant shrines to statesmen and restoring prominent mansions has shifted to include locally significant community structures and vernacular dwellings (and entire cultural landscapes) belonging not to the dominant white male elite, but to women, the working class, immigrants, slaves, and other marginalized groups (Stipe 2003, Hayden 1995).

The shift toward valuing vernacular structures and inclusive cultural landscapes fits with humanistic geography’s concerns for everyday lived experience. Historic preservation practice moves from the mission to understand lived experience in a place to interpreting it to others through museums, restorations, or reuse projects. It also shares a common origin with humanistic geography in that it was, at least in part, a reaction to modernist attempts to rationalize the landscape by eradicating old buildings (Barthel 1996). Preservation had earlier origins on a small scale in the United States (Mt. Vernon

in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Williamsburg in the 1930s, for example), but widespread, formalized preservation activity did not occur until the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. This action was contemporary with reactions in geography against positivist scholarship.

Current activities in historic preservation are increasingly consistent with critical human geography interests in examining systems of power embedded in landscape, place as a locus of complex local, regional, and global relations, and the way identities are constructed in place. These explorations occur most often in interpreting historic structures and landscapes. The process of finding out the variety of values associated with a place “can lead to more relevant and useful ways to understand and manage the built environment as a connected landscape, instead of a disconnected collection of historic buildings” (Mason 2003: 71). More historic sites are being interpreted in ways that tell not only the “heroic statesman’s” story, but also all of the other people who were part of the place (Barthel 1996, Johnson 1996, Hayden 1995). Hayden describes her work with community-based public history projects in Los Angeles that seek to tell the stories of Japanese-Americans, African-Americans, and Latinos. The stories that were meaningful to residents and descendants, and ways to tell the stories, were discovered through not only archival research but collaboration with community groups. Johnson (1996) presents a site of historic preservation as a place where meanings are contested and situated in a complex web of local, national, and international interconnections. Preserved places do not float in isolation, displaying their inherent qualities of authenticity, significance, and meaning. Readers will learn more about how this is true at the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary in Chapter 5. Here, what on the surface seems like an



interesting bit of local history and archeology (remnants of St. Paul's first brewery and a cave with Native American carvings) turns out to be a very complex story about European settlement, subjugation of Native peoples, and the interactions between Native Americans and Whites in relation to the alcohol industry.

Some outcomes from this movement towards values-centered approaches in preservation have been actual case studies that show the theories in action (Weiner and Mason 2006, Taplin, et al 2002). One of these methodologies is called REAP: Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures (Taplin, et al 2002). This method has been used successfully by the National Park Service in planning improvements to Independence National Historic Park in Philadelphia and is approved by the NPS for use elsewhere. REAP is a method "designed to illuminate significant cultural values and to draw out special meanings (Taplin, et al 2002:80). This ethnographic method is different from other more traditional processes in that it is designed to be completed quickly, with a research team instead of one researcher, and by using multiple techniques to ascertain information from stakeholders. Some of these techniques include semi-structured interviews with laypeople and experts, focus groups, transect walks, and behavior mapping (Taplin, et al 2002:87). These techniques are supported with historical and archival research. A first step in this process is determining exactly which communities are associated with the place and who should be consulted about their values for the place. From there researchers conduct a variety of different types of interactions to learn about the values the communities have for the place. The interviews, focus groups, and transect walks all involve direct interaction between stakeholders and researchers while behavior mapping entails just the observations of the researchers of the use of a space.

The REAP process is but one example of a methodology for learning about a community's place values. Other projects around the country, large and small, have used (or used more often) less formalized procedures for learning community values. In the process of developing the Vento Sanctuary, for example, planners hosted a series of community meetings where people could come to learn about the proposed plans for the site, express their opinions and ideas about the plans, and suggest new ideas. Even now, after the site has been complete and open to the public for more than five years, the steering committee still hosts public meetings for new proposals or changes such as planning for the newly acquired abandoned industrial building (future interpretive center) or planning for future trail connections. Oldham County planners contracted with consultants to write a new greenways master plan in 2008. These consultants employed public opinion surveys and a series of public meetings and a "stakeholders summit" to learn about what the community wants and needs in terms of trails and parks. Even Muhlenberg County, on the opposite end of the values-based preservation spectrum, held an informal meeting on the proposed trail site early on in project planning to get input from community members.

### **Connections to transportation and trails planning practice**

There are some useful parallels between values-based preservation theories and methods in historic preservation and the larger movement in planning as a whole towards more public participation.<sup>12</sup> Transportation planning in particular has an entire "industry" evolving from "context sensitive solutions" (previously referred to as context sensitive design). Context sensitive solutions (CSS in DOT parlance) is "a collaborative,

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<sup>12</sup> What is not clear to me at this point is if anyone in these two camps has realized these parallels. Do they work together to incorporate their processes? Do they view them as parallel?

interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility. CSS is an approach that considers the total context within which a transportation improvement project will exist” (Federal Highway Administration 2010 - quoted at Context Sensitive Solutions Clearinghouse). Methods for involving the public range from traditional public hearings to more cooperative listening/visioning sessions and utilizing technology such as collaborative geospatial/geovisual decision support systems (Bailey and Grossardt 2010). From this we can see that CSS is a way for transportation planners to determine what values (contexts) are associated with the place and how those values can best be addressed in sensitive project planning.

Within CSS literature there are many examples of state DOT’s that apply “placemaking principles” to their CSS procedures. The FHWA states that “the goal of placemaking ‘is to create a place that has both a strong sense of community and a comfortable image, as well as a setting and activities and uses that collectively add up to something more than the sum of its often simple parts’” (Project for Public Spaces, as quoted on Contextsensitivesolutions.org). This site, created as a resource for transportation professionals, quotes Project for Public Spaces extensively – in their definition, in their list of placemaking principles, in their references, and in their recommendations for where to receive training in placemaking. Not surprisingly, the site was created for the FHWA by the Project for Public Spaces in collaboration with Scenic America (a national nonprofit organization working on preserving the “visual character”

of America's rural and urban landscapes)<sup>13</sup>The placemaking principles are grouped into four categories that include: philosophical underpinnings, planning with the community, designing with the community, and implementation(these principles were developed by the Wisconsin DOT following PPS ideas).<sup>14</sup>

At the Federal Highway Administration they refer to the Context Sensitive Design movement by the title "Thinking Beyond the Pavement" (a name from a 1998 conference and publication on the subject). It is interesting to note that two of the partners along with the federal agencies in this effort are both the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (other partners include FHWA, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, Utah DOT, Maryland DOT, and Connecticut DOT). At the Thinking Beyond the Pavement conference (1998), attendees defined seven "qualities of excellence in transportation design." These qualities are:

- The project satisfies the purpose and needs as agreed to by a full range of stakeholders. This agreement is forged in the earliest phase of the project and amended as warranted as the project develops.
- The project is a safe facility for both the user and the community.
- The project is in harmony with the community, and it preserves environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic, and natural resource values of the area, i.e., exhibits context sensitive design.

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<sup>13</sup> Other partners on the resource site include: American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, National Park Service, Federal Transit Administration, Institute for Transportation Engineers, and National Association of City Transportation Officials.

<sup>14</sup> **Philosophical Underpinnings:** 1. The community is the expert. 2. Highways create place. 3. Teamwork is fundamental. 4. Obstacles create opportunity. **Planning with the Community:** 5. Learn by observing. 6. Develop a joint vision. **Designing with the Community:** 7. Form supports function. 8. Synergistic solutions. **Implementation:** 9. Start with quick, small, visible success. 10. Money will follow vision and action. 11. The project is never complete.

- The project exceeds the expectations of both designers and stakeholders and achieves a level of excellence in people's minds.
- The project involves efficient and effective use of the resources (time, budget, community) of all involved parties.
- The project is designed and built with minimal disruption to the community.
- The project is seen as having added lasting value to the community.

Qualities one and three are particularly relevant to my discussion here: the early and continuous involvement of the whole range of stakeholders and the creation of a final product that takes into account the values held by these stakeholders.

The Rails to Trails Conservancy offers a “meeting in a box” in its online resource library. Groups can download directions for how to assemble a stakeholder committee, present the idea of trails to a community in a public meeting format, and how to contact the media. It details the process right down to what to say on an invitation to the meeting, what technology to use to present, and how to give an effective public presentation.

The RTC itself also serves as a consultant through its “TrailDART” division (Trail Development Assistance Response Team) (RTC 2005). This group works with communities to develop trail plans, complete mapping projects, do studies and presentations, and coordinate public involvement in the trail development process. Though it is not explicit, one can assume that ascertaining public values is part of this public involvement process. From much RTC literature it is apparent that their goal is not only helping communities to learn what the public values but in educating the public to the value of rail trails.

This chapter traced the theoretical contexts and legacies that frame my research. These legacies come from a cultural landscape geography tradition rich in observation

and description; added to that are both humanistic and critical theoretical frameworks. In addition, this research fits into the context of current research and practice within historic preservation (itself a product of critical and traditional cultural geography). Within historic preservation, the theory and method described as values-based preservation is the most fruitful context in which to place my research. Values-based preservation accounts for many of the same concerns that critical human geography has but is also applicable in everyday preservation practice. The next chapter will address the ways these contexts and legacies are employed through a multi-method process in order to find out what values community members associate with the trails landscapes and the ways in which those values have been deployed.

## **Chapter 4 : Methods**

This project was based upon a multi-methods approach. A combination of extensive and intensive participant observation (or observant participation), individual and group interviews, and thorough archival research allowed me to learn about what I was seeing in place. These methods of gathering information were targeted at all stakeholders from everyday trail users and members of the public, through local leaders and officials, to federal bureaucrats and leaders of national organizations. Each method provided useful information. Some information from one contradicted what I learned from another; each of the three strengthened and supported the other two methodologies. Woven through these endeavors was the framework of discourse analysis – that is, discerning the different discourses at work in a place and the different messages and values they communicate directly and indirectly through promotional materials, signage, the words of individuals, and myriad other ways.

My choice of methods is supported by my theoretical foundation in humanistic geography. Extensive participant observation, augmented by interviews and close examinations of archival materials are at the center of humanistic geographical research as it allows the researcher to learn in great depth the varied stories that intersect in a place.

In this chapter I will explain in detail the methods I chose, their outcomes and shortcomings, and implications of their use. I will use examples from my research to show the ways in which these methods were carried out and how they tie back to the literature from which I draw my guidance.



Figure 4.1: Some abandoned railroad corridors were easier to find than others in our survey of the state for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet.

A discussion of how those case studies were chosen will provide a context for methods employed. My introduction to the world of rails to trails came through a two year research project entitled “The Kentucky Abandoned Railroad Inventory Project” (see Fig. 4.1). I was the lead researcher on the project for the Kentucky Transportation Center, a research center within the University of Kentucky, that primarily contracts with the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. This project came out of state legislation (HB 221, passed in 2000) that created a state rail trail



development office and called for an inventory of abandoned railroad resources with an eye towards future rails to trails development. Through this research I came to know the people around the state working on rails to trails projects and support-building and I became familiar with many different projects from which I could select my case studies.

I choose the Muhlenberg County site because it is Kentucky's only rail trail of significant length, had received Transportation Enhancement funding, and was an example of local government and citizen support (and opposition). I chose the Oldham County greenway for some of the same reasons – it also experienced local support and received Transportation Enhancement funding – but also for some other reasons. Its relationship to historic preservation was different since it prominently features a restored depot and passes along historic Main Street in LaGrange. It was also an effective counterpoint in terms of setting: a suburban county near to the state's largest city (Louisville) versus Muhlenberg County in rural western Kentucky. Because Oldham County is still a work in progress and Muhlenberg County is complete (for now) the two contrasting projects provided useful points of comparison.

A post-qualifying exam return to my home in Minnesota and a desire for a further counterpoint case study determined my choice of the Vento site in St. Paul. This site shared some features in common with the other two: Transportation Enhancement funded, rails to trails project, and had some aspects of historic preservation. But the Vento site provides a setting that is in the downtown core of a very large metropolitan area, a very different infrastructure of support and development, and a project that purposely addressed many different values: historic, recreational, ecological, transportation, and cultural. I think the three cases as a whole tell the story of the variety

that exists around the country in rail trail projects. They explore cases where there was strong opposition (Muhlenberg), strong support (Vento), urban, rural, and suburban settings, aspects of historic preservation values, ecological values, recreation/transportation values, and community connection values. As a set they also exemplify the range and variety of community involvement in local trail plans.

### **Interviewing**

My information-gathering strategy involved one-on-one interviews, small group interviews, and participant observation. While there are a variety of approaches to interviewing, my approach is decidedly informal and much more akin to conversation (Campbell 2004). The key informants I interviewed included local rail trail group leaders, local elected and appointed officials, and state level professionals involved in trails, transportation, and historic preservation. Interviews with professionals from national organizations provided insight and context to what has happened in Kentucky and Minnesota. I also interviewed local residents who have been involved in trail planning and advocacy and who are users of the trails (please see tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 for more details).

Short surveys were a part of two phases of interviewing: trail users at the Muhlenberg Rail Trail and trail advocates at the Kentucky Trails and Greenways Conference. At the trail I used surveys as an entry point, a way to make contact with trail users. We set up a table at the trailhead, offering free bottled water, and asked people to fill out the short survey. This opened up the opportunity to talk with them about the trail. Some users were not interested in completing the survey; others completed the survey and were not interested in speaking more, but several were happy to talk to us about the

trail. At the conference the survey was included in the packet for all attendees, many of whom turned in completed surveys (34 out of 62 attendees). During the conference reception, attendees had the option to be interviewed instead of just filling out the survey on their own. I interviewed three people in this way.

Some interviews with local trail advocates were conducted in small groups of two or three, but these typically informal conversations grew out of participant observation. Other interviews with locals were one-on-one. Interviews with leaders, officials, and professionals typically were one-on-one, but some of my interactions with these people were in small groups as well. Some of them work in teams on trail related issues at their respective organizations, and it was easier for them (and logical) to meet with me as a group. An example of this is the staff at the Kentucky Heritage Council – I met with three of them at once for a group interview and discussion. Another example was the Transportation Enhancement staff at the Minnesota Department of Transportation who I interviewed together.

I attended rail-trail-related group meetings when possible to observe and, in the case of Kentucky Rails to Trails Council, to participate. I did not conduct focus groups or large group sessions. Some of my interviews had to be done over the phone and via email because of the challenge of moving halfway through the dissertation process.

The interviews were semi-directive with questions from me to guide discussion, but lots of room left for new questions to come out of the discussion based on the leading of the informant. I had a set of basic questions that I asked all informants, but other

questions were tailored to their unique experiences regarding trail building, community involvement, or historic preservation.

Table 4.1: Interviews

<b>Person/group</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>National leaders/experts</b>			
Rob Draper	April, 2004	FHWA offices, Washington, D.C.	Team leader at FHWA (now retired) for Byways, Bike-Ped, Trails, and Enhancements programs
Bethaney Bacher	April, 2004	FHWA offices, Washington, D.C.	Staff member for Byways, Bike-Ped, Trails, and Enhancements programs office at FHWA
Keith Laughlin	May, 2004	KY Trails and Greenways Conference	President of Rails to Trails Conservancy
<b>Local leaders/experts</b>			
David Morgan, Becky Proctor, and Patrick Kennedy	August, 2004	KY Heritage Council conference room	Director (now retired) of KHC, conducted as group interview with Proctor(TE programs coordinator) and Kennedy(TE oversight for KTC and restoration project manager)
Judge Rodney Kirtley	July, 2004	On the Muhlenberg County Rail Trail	Muhlenberg County Judge Executive (now former)

Lee Creech	July, 2004	Governor's Office for Local Development, Frankfort, KY	KY Rail Trail Development Officer (now retired)
Laura Taylor	April, 2003	Legislative Research Commission offices, KY State Capitol building, Frankfort, KY	Legislative Research Commission, Tourism and Economic Development Committee Staffer for the KY Legislature
Marty Perry	August, 2008	Via email	KY Heritage Council National Register Coordinator
Paula Nye	July, 2004	KY Transportation Cabinet conference room	Former KY Bike/Ped Coordinator
Jan Clements	July, 2004	KY Transportation Cabinet conference room	Former KY TE coordinator
Nancy Theiss	August, 2004	Oldham County History Center	Oldham County History Center director
Paul Clinton	August, 2004	On and near Oldham County Greenway in Lagrange, KY	President of Greenways for Oldham County (former)
Keith Lovan	February, 2006	KYRTC Conference	President of KY Rails to Trails Council
Shane Tucker	August, 2009	Phone interview	Federal Programs Manager (TE) for KY Transportation Cabinet
Shawn Chambers	October, 2005	MN DOT offices, St. Paul, MN	Planning Director, MN Dept. of Transportation
Mark Anderson	October, 2005	MN DOT offices, St. Paul, MN	Principal Planner, MN Dept. of Transportation

Sarah Clark	April, 2009	Coffee Shop	Bruce Vento Trail project manger
Carol Carey	May, 2009	Swede Hollow Café	Chair, Lower Phalen Creek Project Steering Committee, neighborhood resident
Karin DuPaul	June, 2009	Swede Hollow Café	Lower Phalen Creek Project Steering Committee, neighborhood resident
Don Ganje	June, 2009	St. Paul city offices	St. Paul Parks and Recreation Dept.
Anne Ketz	September, 2009	Her office	Historic preservation consultant
<b>Lay-people</b>			
Trail enthusiasts	February, 2006	KYRTC conference	
Muhlenberg Rail trail users	August, 2004	Muhlenberg County Trail, Greenville, KY	
Vento Sanctuary interns and volunteers	October, 2009	On site at Vento Sanctuary	Included high school interns from the Community Design Center and adult volunteers

I had two basic categories of questions. The first dealt with personal connections to and experiences of places. The second dealt with conscious use of place and value discourses. Questions that would fit into the first category were aimed mainly at local residents who use trails or are involved in building them. Some of these questions included: What do you think of as the special places in your community? Do you think about the rail trail in that way? How important is the trail to the everyday life of your community? How do you see people using it? How do you hear them talking about it?

What do you think people value most about the trail? What do you value most about the trail? What do you think of some of the historic buildings or railroad structures that are near the trail?

The other category of question addresses some of the ways that community members and leaders can use the common values for historic or community places for other purposes, or in a strategic way. These questions, addressed mainly to local officials, state level officials and professionals, and national professionals, included: How do you think the public values the historic landscape or historic structures? How have these ideas changed or guided the way you promote trails/developed this trail? In what ways did you try to highlight historic features in this trail project? What kind of potential is there for cooperation among trail and historic preservation interests? Or, for national leaders, how do you guide local groups to highlight historic features, to work with preservation folks to get things done, to frame the historic value of places, or to encourage marketing of historic value? Another question for national leaders was how do you think local people value places historically and how do you personally think of rail trails in terms of historic value?

In surveys, I asked questions first to assess the respondent's relationship to rail trails (daily user, occasional user, what kinds of use) and their thoughts on what was valuable and enjoyable about the trails they used. In the survey of trail advocates at the conference, I asked more extensive questions on historic elements of trails they used and their opinions on the value of historic elements. I also asked broader questions on what they think of when they think of "the past" and what are the most important places in their communities.

There were a variety of possible outcomes from conducting interviews. The ideal outcome was that I would be able to learn about how people articulate their values for place, learn what places matter to them and why, and learn how the historic shaped the way they developed or conceive of developing their trails. But I recognized that while I may learn some or all of those things, I may not be able to get answers to my questions that make sense to me, or I may get answers to questions I haven't yet thought of asking. Ley and Mountz advise researchers to "hold lightly" to preexisting expectations and any knowledge gained before entering the field, making this knowledge "accountable to fieldwork, rather than...imprison field data within preconceived positions. The field researcher must never suspend the capacity to be surprised" (2001: 236).

Especially in Kentucky, I was surprised at the different story that each player told about the same events. State level professionals told it differently from the local stakeholders and from their counterparts in other divisions and agencies. Local advocates told it differently from one another. I did not experience this in the Minnesota example. By the time I interviewed the third local stakeholder I could have told the story as well as she did; they each told it essentially the same way. I have no explanation for this difference and do not assign any special significance to it. These events reinforced the idea that values shift over time, across space, and among stakeholders at the same project.

I also anticipated that people would have varying abilities to articulate the answers to my questions about value and meaning, even though they may have deep feelings about places. I would be in error, though, to assume that "ordinary" folks are somehow less able to articulate place meaning than "experts" (Burgess et al 1988). The opposite, in fact, is just as likely to be true; years of study about meanings of place have



not helped me to express the meaning of my own home place beyond a flash of images and a deep (but nebulous) feeling of belonging. People may also say that they have never thought about it, or they value these places for reasons completely unrelated to anything historic. When asked to list important places in their communities respondents to my survey listed some expected places such as courthouses and parks but also places like Wal-Mart, an amusement park, and malls. Through the interviewing process I learned that many local experts and lay people had very sophisticated and well articulated ideas about the ways places were valuable to them and to their communities. One surprisingly deep attachment to place came out through my interview with Anne Ketz, the historic preservation consultant who worked on the Vento project. She was making the point that it's important to search for what the community values from many different sources and angles, so as not to miss something. She told me about a Hmong man she spoke to about the Mississippi River (the Vento site and the City of St. Paul are along the Mississippi).

Anne Ketz: You know these constant connections with the Mississippi and the Mekong River and it was so symbolic for him because the Mekong River for the Hmong, many of the Hmong including his family, represented the path to freedom because they literally had to swim across the river to get away. And so he had this symbolism and the connections between the Mekong and the Mississippi.

Lisa Brownell: Yeah, I never would have thought about that.

Anne Ketz: No, so when you talk about those community values, it's pretty interesting stuff. It's not just the continuum of history but it's actually modern day stories that get overlaid, yeah.

While this was not a man I interviewed about the Vento site, it was an indication of how the community members can be tied to a place in ways that are not expected and not readily apparent.

## **Helping them help me to better understand their individual and collective values**

There is a variety of creative methods that are available to help people explain to me (and then help me understand what they mean about) their individual and collective values. The most exciting and interesting ones to me are going with them out to the trail or to other meaningful community places and having them show me and tell me about places they value. These ideas did serve the purpose well – we were able to talk more freely about whatever site or feature they wanted to mention, they felt as if they were on their home turf, and it felt more comfortable and less like an “interview.” I employed this whenever the interviewee was willing and able to meet me on site. These interviews included the ones with Judge Rodney Kirtley and trail users in Muhlenberg County, Paul Clinton and Nancy Theiss in Oldham County, and trail users and interns at the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary.

Using pictures to elicit stories and ideas is another method that was useful. Glassberg (2001) used pictures of places in the community in meetings with community members to find out where the special memory-sites were. He and his research team found that many of the “special places” were not officially designated or places that they anticipated. Some were remembered places that weren’t even there anymore. Price (2001) relates that using pictures in the field during interviews was an important tool for dialogue. She had current and historic pictures of places and people that were meaningful to those she wanted to speak with and the pictures served to break the ice and attract people to talk to her. I more often used an illustrated site map to help interviewees talk about the place. For the Vento case study, I used a promotional brochure that features

photos and a detailed map of the site. People liked to point to different places as they talked about them and it helped them to jog their memories.

One of the most useful ways of helping my research participants aid my understanding of their meanings and values was to use words and phrases of their definitions and not mine. I had to be careful to use words that were meaningful to them and not words that I think should be meaningful or that were meaningful only to me. Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) undertook a large survey of American ideas about history. They learned in pilot surveys that the words “history,” “heritage,” and “past” held very different meanings for people and determined that “the past” meant everything including family stories. “History” meant something learned in school, boring books, and what happened a long time ago with very little relation to their lives. I learned from this example by using “the past” as a more inclusive phrase for history and it also prompted me to look for other words that may not be defined in the same way by everyone.

Coeterier (2002) relates another example. He and his co-researchers determined that historic value was identified as an important part of people’s environmental perception. Beyond this, they had to examine the nature of these values in relation to landscapes, how these values differed from those of the “expert” decision makers in planning and preservation, and what those differences could mean for future projects and management. They discovered that emotional ties and affection for places was one important difference between “experts” and lay people and among lay people who were residents and those who were non-residents (Coeterier 2002). I think that the ideas of meaning and value are a bit fuzzy so I tried out some new phrases with people. I used “values” as a term more often than “meaning” – people seemed to understand when I

would ask “what are some things that are highly valued in your community?” or “what are the different ways the community values this trail?” But sometimes, at first, because I didn’t want to put my words in their mouths, I would use different ways to say “values” such as “what is important to people who use the trail?” or “why do you think the old caboose is so popular?” This approach worked well and almost always led to a conversation around what the community valued about the trails (whether or not the word “value” was ever used).

### **Participant observation**

Participant observation was another strategy employed in this study. I participated in the Kentucky Rails to Trails Council (KRTC) monthly meetings, social events, and conferences while I lived in Kentucky and I continue to participate on the KRTC list serve. I participated in regional conferences and discussions on trail issues with advocates from other states. I was an observant participant as I worked on the Kentucky Abandoned Railroad Inventory Project. Our work on it allowed me to meet with staff at the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet over the course of two years. I was also able to interact with staff at the Kentucky Governor’s Office for Local Development, which was the home of the Rail Trail Development Office (and Officer, Lee Creech) and also some of Kentucky’s legislators and staff at the Legislative Research Council through informational hearings. I went with other members of the KRTC group to explore the potential of a newly abandoned rail corridor in Eastern Kentucky and to speak with the Judge Executives of the three counties through which it traveled. In Minnesota I observed several meetings of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary project’s steering committee and I visited the site on two trail open house events (in addition to other times on my own).

Using my case study trails as a pedestrian, cyclist, or roller-blader opened up another avenue of participant observation. I was able to observe how people use the trail and experience the trail myself. This also allowed me to interact with other users to learn more about their experiences.

Table 4.2: Participant Observation

<b>Organization/Event</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Place</b>
Kentucky Rails to Trails Council	2001-2006	Lexington, KY and throughout the state of KY
Abandoned Railroad Inventory Project and advisory committee	2001-2003	Lexington, Frankfort, and throughout the state of KY
KYRTC/Greenway Conferences	2002, 2004, 2006	Frankfort, Louisville, and Lexington, KY
KYRTC events (booths, parades, board meetings, meetings with local officials)	2001-2006	Lexington, KY, various sites throughout Kentucky
Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary Steering Committee meetings and open house events	2009-2010	Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Council offices and Vento Sanctuary site
Museum visits	2004	Oldham County History Museum
Trail visits	2001-20010	Muhlenberg, Oldham, and Vento
Rails to Trails Conservancy conference	2005	Minneapolis, MN
National Trust for Historic Preservation conferences	2004, 2007	Louisville, KY and St. Paul, MN
MN SHPO conferences	2004-2010	Various sites throughout MN
MN SHPO internship	2004	MN SHPO office, St. Paul, MN
MN Land and Legacy Fund Workshop	2010	Minneapolis Park Board Headquarters

Participant observation led to a richer analysis, as I interacted with people in settings outside of formal interviews (even interviews I set up to be informal are not perceived in the same way as ordinary interaction). Engaging in participant observation led me to new contacts for further interviews, and it eased future communication with contacts through providing some common ground – “breaking the ice,” so to speak. Being an observant participant also led to new insights into how people use and value their trails, and how the trail building and visioning process has happened and continues to happen. These experiences gave me the chance to see how the visions for the future were worked out among the stakeholders within different groups, how they framed their values for the trails, and to learn about the messages they wanted to communicate to the public.

Participant observation has limitations and merits cautions. I participated mainly in the Kentucky Rails to Trails Council, the group that advocates and supports rail trail efforts around the state. Even though it is a statewide organization, all of the members that attend meetings are from Central Kentucky and most are from Lexington. There is a lack of knowledge about what is happening around the state and in local trail efforts. On the other hand, one can learn what the leadership at the state level is thinking and how they reach out to or learn from the local groups. This is especially evident at the biennial conference, in newsletters, and in individual actions that assist groups around the state. One change that has occurred recently to engage a broader state-wide participation has been the use of a call-in conference line for meetings. This way, remote participants can be involved in the meeting and contribute to the discussion and decision making process.

## Archives

I drew from many sources for archival information. To gain information about the individual case studies I examined local newspaper stories and advertisements about the trail projects and community meetings. The meeting minutes and records (some) for the local trail advocacy groups were also available as were the records from the local sponsoring agencies for the trail projects (the County Fiscal Courts). I also considered other promotional and informational material produced by the advocacy groups or the local governments. All records relating to the Transportation Enhancement funding for Kentucky projects are available for review at the Division of Multimodal Programs at the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. These include the original funding applications and letters of support submitted by the communities as well as any other forms that accompanied the projects such as appraisals and invoices. I looked at the TE application for the Vento project that was in the steering committee's possession. Other local archives include county comprehensive greenway, recreation, and land use plans and professionally produced trail plans.

Table 4.3: Archives

<b>Source</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Description</b>
Kentucky Rails to Trails Council	2001-2010	Variety of membership literature, informational material, website, magazine, marketing materials, and donation solicitations.
National Rails to Trails Conservancy	2001-2009	Website, promotional materials, magazine, blogs, social media, membership correspondence, publications, and research reports.

National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse	Accessed 2003-2010 (data on site covers 1997-2010)	Publications on Transportation Enhancements funds, national summary publications, state TE data
Kentucky Transportation Cabinet	2001-2010	Website, promotional materials, TE application files
Kentucky Heritage Council/SHPO	2004-2010	Websites, State Historic Preservation Plan, publications, promotional materials, interpretive signs, newsletters, blog posts, social media
Local Rail Trail groups: Greenways for Oldham County, Muhlenberg County Rails to Trails, Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary	2001-2010	Websites, publications, promotional materials, interpretive signs, newsletters, meeting minutes, blog posts, and social media.
Local history organizations: Oldham County Historical Society, Swede Hollow Neighborhood Organization	2004-2010	Websites, newsletters, exhibits, plans, tour brochures, and other publications
Minnesota Historical Society/SHPO	2004-2010	State Historic Preservation Plan, publications, brochures, membership mailings, promotional materials, blog posts, social media
Minnesota Dept. of Transportation	2004-2010	Website, publications
FHWA and TE documentation	1998-2010	Website, publications, communications
Newspaper articles and ads	2001-2010	<i>Oldham County Era, Louisville Courier-Journal, Muhlenberg Leader-News, RoundAbout Madison, IN, St. Paul Pioneer Press, Minneapolis Star-Tribune</i>



The funding applications express the communities' ideas about their trail project, why it will be valuable to the community, and what it will provide to whom. More accurately, these applications express the authors' ideas about the role the projects would play in the communities.<sup>15</sup> In Muhlenberg County's application, there are no letters of support from any individual or group except for the required one from the sponsoring agency. Oldham County's application was more extensive and included letters from the mayor of LaGrange, and eleven letters from individuals and businesses committing to matching dollars or in-kind donations.

These application packets are useful in that they provide insight into how the counties officially conceived of their projects, and some idea of community support. They are lacking, though, in insight into how individuals and the advocacy groups thought about the projects and the process that led up to these official applications. This absence made it necessary to find other sources that help explain how decisions were made that led to the applications as they were completed.

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<sup>15</sup> The authors were: in Oldham County's case the Fiscal Court and a consultant, in Muhlenberg County's case the Fiscal Court, in the Vento trail's case the steering committee and project administrative staff.



Figure 4.2: Ad for flower shop in Muhlenberg Leader-News 4/18/01

One of the most entertaining and enlightening sources for understanding the public's value for a trail was through newspaper ads in the *Muhlenberg Leader-News*. It was common to see classified ads with copy that read "Trailer for rent. 2 bedrooms. Adjacent to rail trail. Call...". Also common were business print ads that mentioned proximity to the trail as both an amenity and a wayfinding technique (see figure 4.2). Clearly the trail is a community landmark and something that increases the value (economic, use, and others) of places in proximity to it.

State publications from the Kentucky Heritage Council, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, and the Kentucky Rails to Trails Council provided insight into how each of these groups envisions trail building, historic preservation, and

transportation enhancements and in turn how these ideas may have influenced the trail building process in each of the case studies. National publications from Rails to Trails Conservancy, Federal Highway Administration Transportation Enhancements program, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Register of Historic Places, and others in the preservation community helped to reveal their ideas about trail building, historic preservation, value of historic resources in communities and how they are expressed to the public through their programs. Each of these organizations has numerous informational and marketing publications that provide insight into what the groups value about trails, about historic places, or about the planning process. Not only that, these publications tell us what the organizations want the public to know about what they value and the ways they want the public to know it.

Social networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs were useful to examine as additional marketing and promotional messages. All of the national groups (Rails to Trails Conservancy and National Trust for Historic Preservation) are active in social media as well as the local groups (Kentucky Heritage Council, Minnesota Historical Society, and the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary).

Archival records of course have their own set of limitations. Because the documents were created by people or groups they reflect the beliefs and positions of their authors. They are also limited by the fact that not every document is archived. Some records are lost, unreadable, or otherwise unavailable (Pocock 2002). Drawing on the available archival records as broadly as possible can help ease some of these problems. What is missing from an archival collection often says nearly as much about the issue as

does what is there. Sometimes the individuals responsible for archiving records express their own biases in what is preserved and what is not.

### **Rationale for using multiple sources**

Some researchers adhere to the argument that only people themselves can express the social value of a place, but this denies the role of other sources as records of a place's significance in the life of a community (Pocock 2002). These other sources include a wide variety of material and textual artifacts available in archives, in the possession of individuals, or accessible through observation of the landscape (Lowenthal 1985, Duncan and Duncan 2001b, Harner 2001). Pocock (2002) identifies written texts, visual sources, and observation as three main sources of data about the social value ascribed to a place by people. Written texts include everything from scholarly books to newspapers to personal diaries, letters, and blogs. Visual sources are photographs and films and can be in the context of family snapshots, professional advertising brochures, documentaries, or any other image. Others add the landscape as both a visual and textual source for interpretation and many other elements that give clues to social values such as signs and plaques, songs, slogans, and official seals (Duncan and Duncan 2001b, Harner 2001).

One rationale for using visual sources and written texts is that they allow for an analysis over time of changing or fixed social values associated with a place. While the nature of sources changes over time and with technology, the archives can still be compared for their content and themes (Pocock 2002). Another rationale is that, in the same way participant observation helps to support what is learned from formal interviews, exploring visual and textual sources can help to crosscheck what is learned from listening to what people say about the social value of a place (Pocock 2002). As

with any method of gathering data, there are limitations to oral interviews, especially when the intent of ascertaining ideas of social value is known. People become nervous, think they should say the “right answer” that the interviewer is looking for, or forget about everyday places thinking that the researcher would not be interested in them. Balancing oral interviews with written and visual sources can help to temper these limitations and biases.

It is useful to examine a variety of written, visual, and oral sources from local, state, and national organizations and agencies involved with the process of trail building because projects constructed locally are intrinsically tied to the local relationships and values but also to the relationships of those individuals and agencies to others at the state and national scale (Glassberg 2001, Breen 1989).

### **Placing interviews**

The place where we conduct the interviews can have a large effect on how comfortable the participants are and what kind of information they share. Interviews are not only an interaction between the interviewer and participant, but the interaction of each person with the place as well (Sin 2003). Ideas expressed in an interview situation are, at least partially, “structured by the spatial context in which they are conducted” (Sin 2003: 306). I see two primary reasons for wanting to be sensitive to place when interviewing. The first is concern for differential power relations between participants and interviewer: the location chosen can cast one or the other into the “expert” position. The second reason is that the interaction with the place itself can provide meaningful context that words alone in another place could not (Elwood and Martin 2000, Sin 2003). It is also important to understand that information sharing that happens in place may have

the potential to change both parties in their understanding of themselves, each other, and the place (Sin 2003).

As often as possible, I interviewed my participants at the trail or site of the future trail. One benefit of this is that they could show me places as they talk about them. For example as we talk about how the trail in Muhlenberg was built and some of the historic features along it, Judge Kirtley was able to show me the features. While I have visited my case study trails several times, I don't know them as well as the community members who have worked for years on them and this prevents me from thinking I know about the place they are talking about when really I may not.

Another benefit addresses some of the possible power relationships. It was clear in this situation that they are the experts and I have a lot to learn. In addition, especially in the case of local trail advocates, they are excited about and concerned for their trails and being there at the places make them more apt to talk about features and stories as they are reminded of them. Interviews in place were particularly useful with local trail users and leaders. I conducted interviews with Judge Rodney Kirtley and Paul Clinton on site at their respective trails and I also spoke with trail users and volunteers on site in Muhlenberg County and at Vento Sanctuary.

Being on site certainly made it easier to comment on the process of trail building, on the features that the public engages with, and on other issues as the places jogged the memories of the person I interviewed. But in the cases of people who I could not interview on site, their insights were also quite detailed and valuable. Some of the only problems with this were when the person would mention a feature that I couldn't picture

or wasn't familiar with. They were forced to explain it in more detail to me or I just had to nod and smile and try to catch up with what they were talking about. This is when using an illustrated site map at off-trail interviews was very useful.

Many officials and professionals could not get away from their work to visit a trail site with me so we met wherever they were comfortable (I always let them choose the place). Most often this was their own offices or a conference room at their office. This setting created the feeling of them being on their own turf and me being the visitor, the student, and that was just fine with me. I think in most cases it made the interviewees comfortable enough to express the things they wanted to say. There were a few exceptions to this. Some Kentucky transportation officials had some contentious opinions to express and were not comfortable speaking about them in their office setting with colleagues around. A humorous exception to this exception was the interview with Jan Clements, the retiring Kentucky Transportation Enhancements coordinator, which took place in a conference room at the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. Her interview was sprinkled with many comments of "heck, I can say that. What are they going to do, fire me? Ha!"

Some trail advocates wanted to conduct the interview at a coffee shop in the neighborhood. This is how I interviewed several of the Bruce Vento steering committee members – at the local neighborhood hangout. It was especially fun and informative to see them interrupt our interview to say hello and chat with other local folks who came in and out. This setting too was a place that put them at ease and was their choice.

### **Constructing the interviewer and interviewees**

Participants in my research and I constructed each other in multiple ways: they can be seen as experts in relation to me, a young student who doesn't know anything. Or they could be constructed as not knowing anything and I'm the expert from the university who knows all about trails and place meanings and doesn't need them to tell me anything. They might essentialize themselves as small town folks who don't really think about those things or as small town folks who think about those things much more than city people. I may be constructed by them as a real outsider, especially at first, because I am not from Kentucky and I'm not from their town. I discovered while doing the initial abandoned railroad inventory research that my status as a student at the University of Kentucky goes a long way in making me less of an outsider, and that my status as a young woman removed some of the threatening impressions that some locals have for outsiders. Even in St. Paul, the fact that I am from Minneapolis set up an insider/outsider tension since I am not as familiar with their city as my own.

In relationships with trail advocacy groups I think we both constructed ourselves as equals with different knowledges but similar goals. I am admitted to their circles on an equal level because they recognize I have knowledge about and interest in rails to trails issues and I respect their experience and years of work. In a few cases some of my informants have constructed me as having power to effect change – conflating knowledge of rail trail potential around the state with some ability to see that potential transformed into reality. This is flattering but a bit of an uncomfortable and frustrating feeling (since it is completely false).



In interactions with professionals at the state level I employed different self-constructing strategies. One is the equal, one who knows a lot about the kinds of issues they deal with all the time, particularly in the case of Multimodal and trails development professionals. The other is the young college student working on a project who is just there to listen and learn. Some of the state staffers viewed me in this way to the extreme: even after two years of working on the Kentucky Abandoned Railroad Inventory project some members of the advisory board still couldn't understand that the girl was the one doing the work. They directed all of their communication to my director who repeatedly had to say "I don't know. Ask Lisa. She did the research".

As I interviewed Sarah Clark, staffer on the Bruce Vento project, she visibly changed the way she related and communicated with me after she learned I was a doctoral student doing dissertation research and not "just a college student." She said she often speaks to beginning landscape architecture students who are working on class projects and have big ideas of how they (The Lower Phalen Creek/Vento Sanctuary Project) could do their project better and she was glad for a change from that scenario. I had, in modesty, introduced myself as merely a student studying the site for a research project. Skepticism toward academics was not evident in interviews of trail users but Anne Ketz, historic preservation consultant for the Vento project, expressed it directly. She said that academics wrongly assume that "knowledge in a place is rooted in books and libraries" but "the value of a place is way less tangible than [that]." Because of the possibilities of these kinds of perceptions, I was cautious in appearing too "academic" to my informants.

All of these situations hold the opportunity for transformation on my part and the part of the participants. Before completing my field work I thought a great deal about tending to the nervousness of the interviewees, ignoring of course my own shyness at interviewing even people I know well! My own feelings affect how I ask questions and which ones I ask. Past experience has shown me that there is a large initial barrier but that once I begin the conversation it becomes easier. Again and again I have watched my own transformation as a researcher within individual interviews and from time to time as I become more confident and at ease. These transformations happen as I perceive what they are thinking about me and the whole process of being interviewed (or just chatting, as an interview usually turns into, much to our mutual relief). I think this change affects how they respond because in a formal interview situation there is some impulse to try to answer the “right” way or the way that the interviewer may want; this is less true in interactions that are, or at least feel as if they are, ordinary conversations.

Almost without fail, I found my interviewees to be completely at ease with the conversations. An odd exception was the group interview of David Morgan, Becky Shipp, and Roger Stapleton at the Kentucky Heritage Council. Because I asked them a lot of questions about the Transportation Enhancements program, trying to get at why Kentucky used such a disproportionate amount of its TE funds for historic preservation versus trail building, I think Mr. Morgan was on the defensive and the others followed his lead. He spent a good portion of the time while we were talking thumbing through a printed database of TE projects in the state pointing out to me the ones that included trails “here’s one!” and so on. I suspect individual interviews with the other two in the room

might have yielded different insights than the group interview did, but I deferred to their (his?) preferences.

I had to make a technological decision that was also deeply tied to this idea of differential power relationships and comfort in an interview situation. For my first few years of research I did not use any type of recording device. I relied entirely on hand written notes and my memory and I later would transcribe the interview notes from them into more complete typed records. There are of course many pros and cons with this decision. On the one hand, I definitely lost some nuance, a few ideas, and some wonderful precise quotes. Especially as time stretched on, my notes were not as effective as a recording would have been in helping me to use these archives to their full potential for analysis. But on the other hand, the idea of recording my voice made me nervous, it made me not act myself, and it steals some of the authenticity of my own voice from the interview process. Also, I believe that even if the interviewee consents to being recorded, they too think they can't quite be themselves. Several times in interviews people would ask that I not write something down, so I think that if they were being recorded they would have been even less forthcoming. But then, fully knowing the complications of deciding to change my mind, I began to use a digital recorder for interviews, transcribing them later. I recorded some of the later interviews relating to the Bruce Vento Sanctuary. This inconsistency pains me, but I am much happier with the details I was able to take away from each interview and none of my interviewees expressed concern at being recorded. I still felt wooden, but hope that I was as authentic as possible.

Every research experience is shaped by the researcher and the participants; both are likely to be changed through the process, both are integral parts of the process

(England 1994). The research may change the way interviewees look at themselves and their ideas through the opportunity it affords them to reflect on their values, experiences, and the meanings they find in places (England 1994). This may not be something they are accustomed to doing, especially with a near-stranger from outside their family and community.

They may come to understand new ways of looking at their communities and special places through me sharing ideas with them or through discussion with others. They may come to see themselves as experts on their place if I demonstrate that's how I view them and take seriously all that they have to tell me, though this type of comment is usually dismissed with embarrassment.

### **Positionality and research issues**

Reflexivity in research is “a strategy for situating knowledges: that is, as a means of avoiding the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge” (Rose 1997: 306). Situating ourselves as researchers involves making clear our position in relation to our research subjects and also acknowledging the limits of our research conclusions, avoiding any claims to universality. Each researcher is tied up in multiple contexts that come to play in doing research. These can be class, age, gender, ethnicity, life experience, place of residence, and sundry other contexts. Any one of these can “shape our capacity to tell the story of others” (Ley and Mountz 2001). Reflexivity calls for the researcher to both look inward at her own positions and look outward at the relationships with those being researched in a self-conscious and self-critical way (Mohammed 2001).

Rose (1997) discusses the difficulties with the idea of reflexivity; it is in fact hugely difficult to account for all of our positions in relation to those we research and especially to imagine the implications of those relationships. It presumes that the researcher is able to make sense of very complicated webs, and that those webs can even be understood in the first place (Rose 1997, Duncan and Duncan 2001a). Being reflexive can help us as researchers to be aware of uneven relationships but it can't change or remove them (England 1994).

### **When to stop**

I chose to end the field work process when I started knowing what answers to expect when I asked questions. If I correctly anticipated what people would say because I had heard it so many times the same way before, I probably had enough information to quit (Hart 1996). This situation is called "saturation," and is defined as the time when "no new themes or constructs emerge" (Baxter and Eyles 1997: 513). I had to weigh this against my research goals. Had I asked the questions I wanted to ask? Had I considered thoroughly the new questions that had arisen during the course of the research? Do I feel like I can answer the questions I set out to answer in a way that I and those whose experiences I am seeking to explain will find satisfactory?

This rather simplistic measure had to be combined with at least two other measures. The first is that I spoke to a fairly broad cross section of people, in keeping with the way I proposed to do my research. This means not just lay people, or leaders, or state officials. The other measure is one of practicality and common sense. My research could go on for a long time because, as we have learned, meanings and values change over time. I might be able to capture these changes if I stay at it long enough, but that is

not very practical with the scope of this project and my goal to finish it in a reasonable amount of time.

Validity is not measured by the size of the sample and its generalizability to other cases but the way that meanings are interpreted from the interviews, experiences, and archival material (Baxter and Eyles 1997). This means that the data is not misinterpreted by me, as seen by those whom I researched and as viewed by others outside the case in relation to other literature.

It would seem sensible that my analysis of people's values and meanings for historic landscapes in their communities should correspond to the way these values are (or look to be) expressed on the landscape. But accounting for dual meanings makes the research more reliable and valid as an explanation of places and reality of the people who live there (Ley and Mountz 2001). It would be a richer explanation if it accounts for these shifting and multiple meanings. Sometimes people make decisions that seem to be the opposite of their values.

Trail advocates may make decisions that don't follow directly from their values and may even seem contradictory, but they reveal an insightful understanding of the issues of place meaning, the value of historic landscapes, and "special places." It was challenging to try to discover the ways participants negotiated between personal values, group values, and the variety of other discourses that came to play in the process of trail development. This process was especially evident in the Bruce Vento site as the project managers had to carefully navigate the conflicting values of the historic features on the site. How should the sacred Native American cave be interpreted in its proximity to the

ruins of the first Euro-American brewery in St. Paul (with all the accompanying actual and symbolic destruction of the settlers and their alcohol industries on Native populations)?

### **Information to answer central and secondary questions**

I used archives, participant observation, and interviews in combination to get at how the different intersecting discourses use the ideas “historic” or “sense of the past” in words, actions, or built landscapes and to find out in what ways places are valued, devalued, and revalued. For example, newspaper stories about a trail express community value of the place as it shows people using the trail in photographs and in relating how many people use it in different ways. Values are expressed by individuals directly and indirectly. I tried to elicit this in interviews by asking questions such as how do you use the trail? Is it important to you and your family? How do you think it is important in the community? What did you think of the rail corridor when it still had trains running on it? When it was abandoned? When you heard it would be redeveloped? I tried to discover the ideas about the historic value of the corridor and related structures by asking people what they see as being historic along the trail and how these places contribute to the trail experience (or not).

In Muhlenberg County, interest in historic preservation has expanded since the completion of the trail. A caboose was moved in to serve as a small museum, an adjacent school was planned to be restored as a community center, and railroad-related and other historic-themed artifacts were installed or replicated in the trail corridor. In Oldham County, a rapidly suburbanizing neighbor of Louisville, there is concerted effort in the community to focus on its history and sense of place through programs sponsored by the

Oldham County Historical Society. A children's program at the County History Center for Spring 2004 was entitled "Finding My Sense of Place" and included workshops on nineteenth century crafts, local natural disasters, and caring for others in the community; a subsequent exhibit at the museum was called "Mapping My Special Places." I gained insight into values concerning historic places and other community places through exploring these programs and exhibits.

Examining the national literature helped me understand, to a certain extent, how some of these ideas are encouraged and handed down to local groups. The historic value of railroad corridors and structures is a strong focus, for example, at the national Rails to Trails Conservancy. This combination of local and national, primary and secondary, and the constant tacking back and forth between to compare meanings, looking for contradictions or reinforcements enriched my analysis and opened new avenues of understanding what values intersected in the different trail cases.

### **Analysis of interviews and the written record**

I relied on discourse and content analysis to explore the meanings of the communication of speakers and authors (both individuals and organizations or agencies) who are stakeholders in the trail building processes at my three case studies. The intersection of diverse discourses through the process of trail building is the focus of this research. It is here in the interplay of multiple understandings of a sense of history and place value that new understanding can be gained.

Content analysis is "a method of inquiry into *symbolic meaning* of messages," understanding that messages have many meanings and that those meanings are not necessarily shared (Krippendorff 1980). Content analysis is a method that is capable of



examining attitudes, interests, and values of groups (Krippendorff 1980, after Berelson 1952).

Content analysis can be thought of as within the bounds of the larger process of discourse analysis because it is “a way of understanding the symbolic qualities of texts...the way that elements of a text always refer to the wider cultural context of which they are a part” (Rose 2001:55). Content analysis provides some practical direction as a method within the larger theory/method of discourse analysis. If landscapes can be thought of as “discourses materialized” (Schein 1997) then a first step to understanding how this happens is to examine what discourses have an impact on the place and what those discourses express.

I define discourse as a certain “way of talking about and understanding the world” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:1), a sense of shared meaning (Duncan 1990, Schein 1997). But this definition includes an understanding that even though a discourse “fixes meaning in a particular way,” it does not command meaning to be “fixed exactly in that way forever” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:29). It is understood that meanings are not fixed across time, space, or different social groups. This definition of discourse is not confined to a sense of only language or visual communication but to all “social practice” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:67, after Fairclough 1993, 1995).

The use of discourse analysis as a method presumes an acceptance of the basic ideas of discourse theory. There are many discourse analytical approaches (Fairclough, Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe) but they all share some common characteristics. These include: the idea that there is not just one, pre-existing system of meaning but instead

there are many systems and these are constantly being maintained and reshaped in context; and that the maintenance and transformation of these systems should be the focus of analysis of the places where discourses (systems of meaning) are in action (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:12). Discourse is conceived as being both constituting and constitutive of the social world. It plays a part in shaping “social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning” (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:67, after Fairclough 1995).

Within content analysis, I used the methods of qualitative content analysis. These methods are distinguished from traditional content analysis by a stronger focus on the meaning of texts instead of the frequency of particular words or themes (Titscher, et al. 2000). Qualitative content analysis takes into account shifts of meaning dependent on context. This method helped me to answer my research questions because it helped me to understand the way a group or individual conceives of a sense of the past or the value of a place.

Qualitative content analysis contrasts with other ethnographic methods, grounded theory in particular, in that, while it is sensitive to shifting meanings, it still approaches texts with a set of categories already in place before examination (Titscher, et al. 2000). Grounded theory seeks to develop categories through the process of examining the texts and has little interest in frequency analyses (Strauss and Corbin 1994, Titscher, et al. 2000). Ethnographic methods such as grounded theory can help inform the use of qualitative content analysis when it is employed in the preliminary stages of research to help discern and frame the categories and themes that will shape future analysis.

The primary stakeholders whose discourses are materialized on the trail landscapes of my three cases are those of the local trail advocates, opponents, and residents; local leaders and officials; state and national historic preservation agencies; state transportation departments; federal programs such as Transportation Enhancements and Federal Highway Administration; and state and national rails to trails organizations.

By examining the written record of the trail-building process I looked for key themes as they related to questions of historic preservation, landscape values, and paths to the past (Rose 2001, Lowenthal 1985). Themes were strengthened by references that groups and individuals made to them during interviews or meetings that I observed. It was important to refer back and forth between the reading and listening to learn what the key themes were and how they were expressed the same or differently. Content analysis also helped to illuminate what was missing from the different archives in comparison with each other and with what was spoken. In addition I looked for ways that the communities and agencies conceive of a sense of history, how they expressed it in their written record or their words, and the way they articulate their value of the trail corridors as historic places. These themes are informed not only by examination of the words and actions of the stakeholders but also through the literature on historic preservation, community expressions of social value, and social memory.

### **Integration of primary and secondary information**

I do not believe either primary or secondary information is inherently more valid; both teach different things. Statistics on trail funding or how Transportation Enhancement money was spent within a state is valid and important, but they are not the whole story. Secondary information formed the basis for questions to ask of the primary information.

For example, as of 2003, Kentucky spent ten times as much of its TE money on historic preservation projects as any other state (National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse 2010 [2004]). These statistics caused me to ask “why?” of my informants who are familiar with the process, directed me to read the TE applications to learn more about how communities conceive of the historic value of transportation-related projects, and told me to start reading archival information with that question in mind. In the same way, primary information directs me back to the secondary information to look for different patterns once I had a bit more insight into the process.

### **Validity measures**

Because I am looking at the information produced by discourses (shared-meaning-makers), it is all biased in some way and more so for organizations like the Rails to Trails Conservancy since they are actively and unashamedly promoting an agenda. This is less true for local governments and state agencies, but each of these certainly has distinct goals and values in mind. I had to keep these potential biases in mind as I read, looked, and listened. I didn’t necessarily discard any information because it was biased, but that bias, as observed, became another dimension of the analysis. It was more difficult to deal with information that was unrepresentative. For example, in Muhlenberg County, the Judge Executive went ahead with planning the trail even though the idea was not widely supported in the community at the time. So his words and actions were highly unrepresentative, yet meaningful in telling the story of the process. The activities of the local trail groups may not be representative of the communities as a whole, but only of the active discourses involved in the building of the trails. Constant contextualizing with other sources produced by different individuals and groups on the

same issue, where possible, and contextualizing with interviews and other spoken words, helped to keep balance among the information I collected.

I employed two measures of validity to assess my research at completion and along the way: coherence and fruitfulness (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). Coherence refers to the way that the framework and analysis should be congruent, that they are comprehensible and plausible. The coherence is testable by the reader through using extensive quotations from interviews and from texts to show examples of how the discourses were analyzed. Fruitfulness refers to the “explanatory potential” of the analysis and its capacity to lead to new understandings (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002:125). The fruitfulness of the research applies both to future academic applications for further understanding of place meanings in geography or other disciplines, and also to trail-building communities and historic preservation interests.

In the following three chapters I move to a detailed description and analysis of the three case studies: Muhlenberg County Rail Trail and Oldham County Greenways in Kentucky, and Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary in Minnesota. I employ a framework devised by Richard Schein to organize my analysis (Schein 2009). This framework for interpreting cultural landscapes calls first for landscape histories, or detailed descriptions of the landscapes. From there it moves on to interpretation of the meanings and values groups and individuals assign to/experience in the landscapes. Finally the framework calls for a detailed analysis of the ways landscapes mediate or facilitate meanings and an examination of the discourses materialized through the places. Schein’s framework shaped my analysis, but I did not have it as I was doing most of my research prior to 2009; I fit my research into the framework he laid out. I use his methodology to describe

and analyze what I discovered through my qualitative research methods of participant observation, interviews, and archival research. This framework is a useful bridge between traditional landscape observation, so important to geographical tradition, and current critical human geography theoretical foundations. It does not deny the researcher the opportunity of careful and fruitful landscape description but does not stop there, leaving off important analysis of the forces at play and meanings played out in place.

## **Chapter 5 : Case studies: landscape histories**

To examine these three case studies in more detail I'll be using a methodological framework developed by Richard Schein (2009). It helps the landscape observer to explore not just what a cultural landscape looks like and how it got that way, but how it works, how it is understood, and what it means to those who live and move in and through the place. His framework lays out four steps. The first is telling the landscape history of the place being studied: what is it like, what is the history, what are its parts, who built its parts, why and when did it develop as it did? I address these points in this chapter. The next step moves on to interpretation from description: what does it mean, as a place, to the people who use it? What values are tied up in the place and whose values are they? This step examines meaning on both individual and group scales. I address these points in Chapter 6: Landscape Meanings and Values.

The third step asks us to look at how the place facilitates and mediates social, cultural, political, economic, or other meanings and conversations. And the final step involves examining the landscape as “discourse materialized” – in seeing what larger discourses are illustrated through the place. I address both of these topics in relation to all three case studies in Chapter 7: Landscapes and Community Values.

### **Types of rails to trails projects around the country**

Almost every rail trail project has some element of historic preservation in its intent and goals because every rail corridor that is converted into a trail prevents the partitioning and obliteration of an historic site. Some projects focus more consciously than others on the historic aspects of the corridor and the structures that supported its use as a railroad.

Nationally, there are two main modes of trail projects. First are those with a few or no remaining historic structures, developed first and foremost as recreational or transportation amenities. The trails were built first and, as they were used, any historic or railroad-related structures near the trail were given attention and restored, either by a private entity or by the public agency that manages the trail (or jurisdiction through which the trail passes). Two common scenarios illustrating this are depots that are restored as trail-user businesses such as restaurants or bike shops, or depots that are restored as trail information and service centers with restrooms and maps. Another variation of this type is the trail project that piques community interest in railroad or other historic structures that were lost before the trail was built. There are many communities that have reconstructed replicas of mills, depots, or bridges to recall the corridor's past.

Second are those projects that have historic structures as the focal point. Many times this structure is a community rallying point, a symbol of community identity, or becomes an attractive place for adaptive reuse. A trail project becomes a way to preserve and bring attention and new life to a historic structure. The trails in these types of projects are in a way secondary in that they are developed after the structure is restored.

The amenity and historic structure types form the ends of a wide continuum. Most completed trails are hybrid projects – some combination of recreation-nature and historic landscape feature. Hybrid trails enjoy community support for their recreational purpose, but the remaining historic structures such as depots and bridges enhance the trails' value to users. There are many variations within the hybrid category in terms of the timing, scale, and number of restoration projects that occur along a trail.



I have chosen to examine three trail projects representative of trail-building experiences nationwide. Two of these projects are in Kentucky: the Muhlenberg County Rail Trail in western Kentucky and the Oldham County Greenway in suburban Louisville. The third is in Minnesota: the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. All three of these cases are hybrid projects; they each feature historic structures but also have a focus on recreational use or connection to natural amenities.

### **A note on methodology**

To tell these landscape histories I first had to learn what the stories of each place were. This process involved site visits to familiarize myself with how the landscapes looked, their elements, and how people used them. Some site visits incorporated interviews with local advocates or professionals involved in the trail development process. Other visits were primarily participant observation as I either walked, bicycled, or roller-bladed on the trails with my family or alone. Off site interviews with key players in the trails' stories added another layer to each story as I learned about the history, the public opinions for, and the development process for each site. Archival research was the next important way that I learned about the sites. This included historical photos, maps, and books, newspaper accounts of the trail development, marketing materials produced by the different trail managers, planning documents, funding applications, filings with the Surface Transportation Board, committee meeting minutes, social media posts, and websites. This combination of landscape observation supported by archival and qualitative research worked well to collect information not only on the biographies of the sites, but also to learn about the meanings and values associated with them and the

discourses materialized through them, as we will see in subsequent chapters (Lewis 1993, Hart personal communication).

## **Muhlenberg County Rail Trail**

### **Introduction**

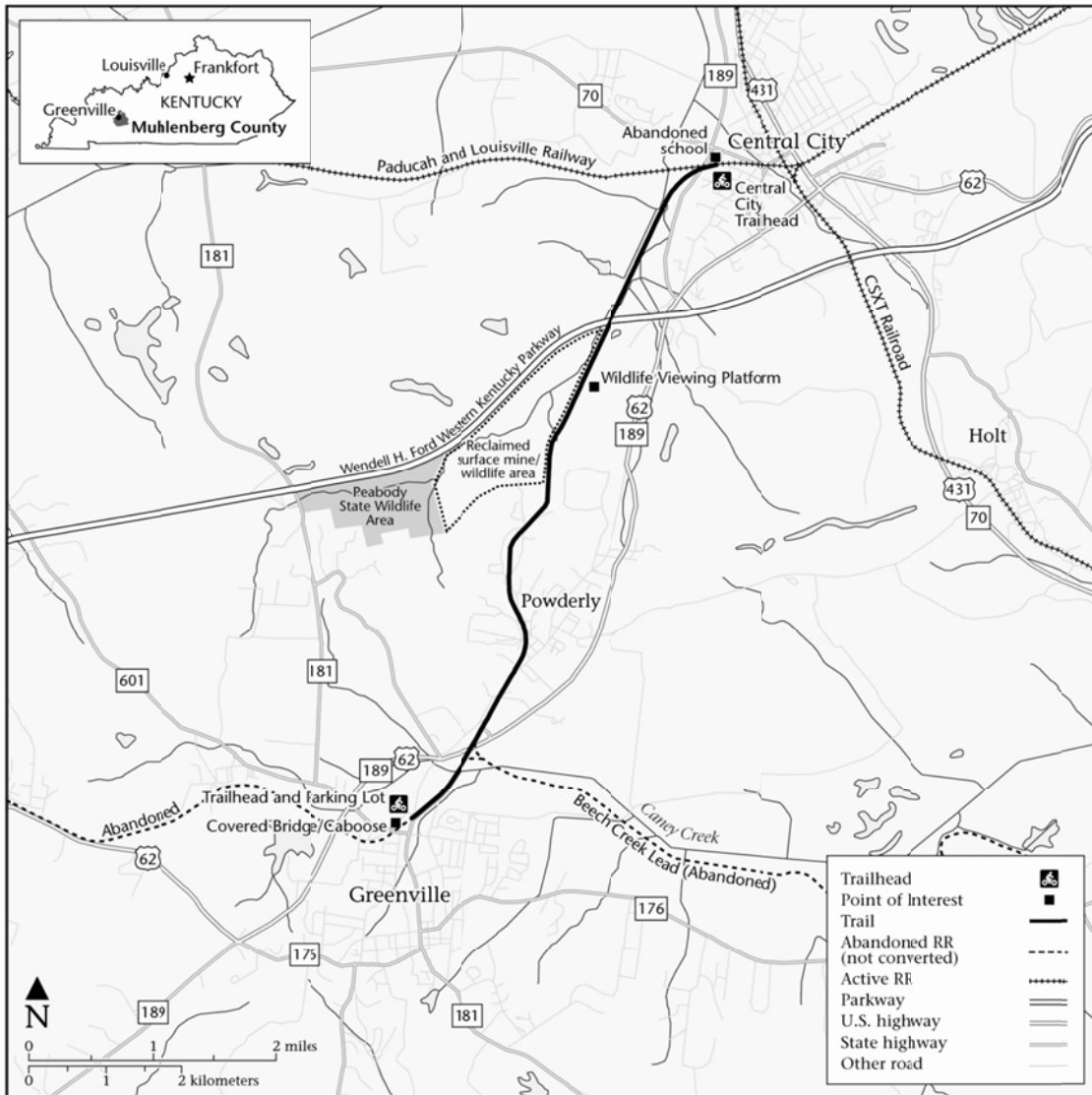
The Muhlenberg County Rail Trail is six miles long and connects the towns of Central City and Greenville, Kentucky. These Western Kentucky coal-field towns are each home to around 5,000 people and an additional small town, Powderly, lies between them. This project showcases the way that values for a place shift up and down over time as use and purpose changes. This trail developed with a recreation focus and interest in historic sites and structures came after completion of the trail, as the public's interest increased. I chose this trail as a case study because it is the longest (to date) completed trail in Kentucky and one that trail advocates use as an example of success. It is also representative of the difficulties trail advocates have had in building rail trails in the state in terms of community opposition and negotiations. The trail is an effective example of how a rail trail can contribute to rural life in community, economic, and recreational terms. Muhlenberg County is also a fruitful case study to examine "values in place." While their community shares many values in common with other trail communities, the way these values are expressed through and about the trail are unique. This endeavor to discover the connections of people to places is fundamental to the humanistic geographical tradition: the human story in place.

### **Background**

The right of way that became the Muhlenberg County Rail Trail began its railroad service in 1871 as part of the Elizabethtown and Paducah Railroad (Vernon 1873). After

changing hands a few times in the late nineteenth century, it was sold to the Illinois Central Railroad (ICRR) in 1897 (Rothert 1913). Central City was an important place on the ICRR because it was a division point where they changed the engines and crews on the route from Memphis to Louisville (Camplin 1984).

Figure 5.1: Map of Muhlenberg County Rail Trail



Map created by Mike Foster, University of Minnesota Cartography Lab

The line remained part of the ICRR until it was sold off in an early 1980s restructuring process. The Paducah and Louisville Railway (PAL) was formed at that time to take over operation of ICRR's trackage in Kentucky and has become Kentucky's largest regional shortline railroad with about 265 miles of track in the state (Paducah and Louisville Railway 2010). The arrival of the railroad in the 1870's supported the growth of Muhlenberg County's coal industry. The coal industry required rail to transport the coal from mine to tipple and from tipple to market outside the county. A Muhlenberg County historian stated that "it was because of the railroads that the mines were opened and the towns built" (Camplin 1984: 203).

The last train ran on the line in 1996, serving a slag facility on the Beech Creek Lead (STB filing 1998). The PAL RR began official abandonment proceedings in 1998 and the trail effort began soon after. During the summer of 1998 the Kentucky Rails to Trails Council filed a "trail use condition" with the Surface Transportation Board (STB) on behalf of Muhlenberg County. This began the railbanking procedure by opening official negotiations with the abandoning railroad. A Notice of Interim Trail Use (NITU) decision was issued later that summer by the STB. The NITU states that the rail corridor can be used as a trail in the "interim" period should the rail line ever be reactivated.

When the PAL RR abandoned the line, they left four original railroad bridges for reuse by the trail. All basic steel girder bridges over small streams, they did not provide any special scenic or historic amenities, though their presence did save the trail builders many thousands of dollars in bridge reconstruction costs. Railroad signal lights were also left in place along the line. Judge Kirtley expressed a desire for the trail planners to leave a "railroad feel" to the trail. They also added a few more signal lights to encourage this.

In 2003 the Paducah and Louisville RR donated a caboose to the trail for use as a small museum and trail center and to further add to the “historic railroad feel.”



Figure 5.2: Caboose at Greenville trailhead

The trail is six feet wide, paved in asphalt with one foot wide gravel shoulders. It has a small trailhead parking lot at Greenville and another trailhead at Central City. In Powderly it connects to the city park. Most of the traffic on the trail comes in the first two miles north from Greenville. This end has the larger parking area and is lit at night. Also found here is the popular covered bridge and train caboose.

Traveling northeast, the trail user passes through the “nature area” of the trail (this is what locals call it). This area, former mine lands reclaimed as Wildlife Management Areas, includes wetlands, ponds, creeks, open fields, and wooded areas. It is home to many bird species, fish, beaver, and other wildlife. Local Boy Scout troops built a wildlife viewing platform and posted bird identification signs.

At the Central City terminus, trail users leave the railroad right of way - the only part of the trail that does not follow the original right of way exactly. Here users pass a long abandoned and derelict school building (the result of school consolidation years ago) alongside the trail head. It went unnoticed while the right of way was an active and then abandoned railroad, but as trail users “rediscovered” it, there was a community effort to save the building from destruction and reuse it as a community center. As of 2004, plans were in place to restore the building as a community wellness/fitness center that would house an indoor pool in the former gym and provide space for classes and events; I was unable to ascertain the current status of this project. These plans mesh with the trail’s new role in the communities’ wellness activities.

The county made several additions to the trail beside the actual railroad-related artifacts (whether originally from this line or not). One addition is a covered bridge built over an original railroad bridge. Even though no railroad ever constructed wooden covered bridges like this (they were built only for roads and horse traffic), locals thought it added “historic feel” to the place and it became very popular with community members and especially children. Another addition is community notice boards at the trail heads. These boards are sheltered by hip roofed structures purposely reminiscent of traditional depot architecture. Kirtley notes that, in his opinion, these are the most popular places in town to post notices.

### **Creation**

In 1998 a friend of Rodney Kirtley, the Judge Executive of Muhlenberg County, introduced him to the idea of rails to trails. The Judge’s friend saw potential in the soon-to-be-abandoned P and L line and invited the Judge on a Saturday mountain bike ride

along the rough ballast surface of the abandoned line. It was Kirtley's first ride on the line and he noticed all of the illegal dumping and junk-filled backyards abutting the trail, but immediately liked his friend's idea of the rail trail. On Monday Judge Kirtley called the Paducah and Louisville Railroad. He discovered that he'd missed out on the western portion of the corridor because it had already been abandoned and sold off, but the parts not yet officially abandoned were still available for railbanking (the Greenville to Central City line and the Beech Creek Lead [see Figure 5.1]). The abandonment notice made front page news in the Muhlenberg County Leader-News in April 1998. There was mention of a county bicycle club that formed recently and an ad for a ride they organized. In this it stated that "an additional goal [of the club] is to promote a coalition to develop a safe route between Greenville and Central City for Muhlenberg County families to walk, cycle or skate safely. This is greatly needed and will make our community a more desirable place to live" (MLN 8/19/98, ad for Bye Bye Bicycle Club). It is not clear if this club was involved in trails planning or shared some members with the future trails committee, but it does indicate that there was at least some interest in safe pedestrian facilities in the county before the trail plans were publicly announced.



Figure 5.3: Abandoned PAL line west of Greenville, already sold off and the railbed salvaged for its gravel.

Judge Kirtley enthusiastically pursued completing the project and in January 1999 helped form a committee to oversee the task. The Muhlenberg Rails to Trails Committee incorporated and elected Rebecca Keith as chairperson. This committee worked with the Kentucky Rails to Trails Council to accomplish railbanking the line with the County Fiscal Court as the official local sponsor (Keith 2003). The committee placed an article in the local paper that invited the public to walk the future route of the trail and learn about the possibilities. They then worked with the county to apply for Transportation Enhancement funds.

The official notice of railroad abandonment consummation was filed with the STB in April, 1999. The county applied under the category of “preservation of abandoned railroad corridors” in the 1999 round of TE funding and they received all that they requested: \$213,956. The local match was \$52,364 for a total cost of \$266,320. This



mix of TE money and matching funds from Muhlenberg County paid for the construction of the trail during the summer of 2000. The trail opened officially in October 2000, but the community started using the pathway even before paving was complete (Keith 2003). In a subsequent round of Transportation Enhancement funding (2002), the county added lights for the first mile of the trail from this trailhead which is popular with users after work into the evening. Officially, the trail is a linear county park six miles long by sixty-six feet wide (Kirtley 2004a).

Judge Kirtley thought it was a great “feel good project” and that “we’re gonna be heroes” but was surprised to find only six supporters and 144 opponents at the first public hearing, a county magistrates meeting. In-town opponents were concerned with the prospect of increased crime that a trail through their backyards was sure to bring. Residents of the agricultural area through which the trail would pass wanted the opportunity to connect their divided fields and gain a bit of acreage back from the right of way. They were also opposed to trail users passing between and near their properties (Kirtley 2004a).

The magistrates tabled the project, telling Judge Kirtley “I can’t believe you’ve done this!” But Kirtley called the Rails to Trails Conservancy who told him “don’t give up!” To compromise and at least build something, Kirtley and the trail supporters chose to just develop the line that led from Greenville to Central City and not pursue a spur line that ran primarily through agricultural land. The most outspoken opposition came against the rural spur line.

The model of just a few supporters was not a recipe for trail success. Without the broad support of local businesses, residents, and leaders, this trail should never have been built. Indeed, in most places, it would have languished and stalled, but Judge Kirtley had a large impact on its success. His leadership and support for the trail carried it through, along with the few dedicated supporters on the Rails to Trails Committee.

The opening week of the new trail in August 2000 brought more surprises. The trail was so busy; one could hardly get on it. The local Wal-Mart Supercenter sold out of bicycles. Kirtley said “overnight it was the most popular thing we’d ever done.” More than 300 people used the trail each day. Within the first month the parking areas at the trail heads had to be doubled in size to accommodate all the users. It soon became clear that the trail should have been built at an eight foot width instead of six. In assessing the changes the trail brought to the county Kirtley said the “quality of life has jumped to a different level.” (Kirtley 2004a).

The Wendell Ford Training Center (an Army National Guard training facility) adjacent to trail provided some assistance with the trail and also use it for training. The county also formed a unique partnership with the county jail and local state correctional facility for inmate labor. This “jail to trail” arrangement provides ongoing assistance with trail maintenance and construction. Inmates provided labor to construct the covered bridge (a local lumber company donated the materials). They also help with regular trash pickup and mowing (Kirtley 2004a). Kirtley stated that they have had no problems with this arrangement whatsoever and it has proved a key piece of the financial puzzle of maintaining the trail.

As time passed businesses that backed up to the trail reoriented from the road to the trail. One car dealer moved his cars to face the trail – slow moving pedestrians were more likely to stop and look at the cars than motorists speeding by. Several new businesses opened up near the trail. Even non-adjacent businesses saw the trail's impact. Restaurant and motel owners noted that many of their customers drove in from an hour away to use the longest paved rail trail in the state. Adjacent homeowners cleaned and opened their yards to the trail. They bought bikes and former opponents became supporters. One individual built a gazebo on his property near the trail and sold refreshments to trail users.

Community groups use the trail for events such as a March-of-Dimes fundraiser walk. The trailhead in Powderly is a small city park with picnic areas and a bandstand. This spot is popular as a site for on-trail events, though initially the city of Powderly fought the trail. The high school cross country team uses the trail for practices and doctors in the area now prescribe trail walking to their patients to improve their health.

Historic preservation opportunities and goals emerged as the trail enjoyed more and more use by the community. The school building in Central City is one example of this. New attention is also being paid to the former coal mine sites adjacent to the trail. Beginning in 1887 there were coal tipples in the Powderly area for underground mines; it was one of the most heavily mined areas of Muhlenberg County with at least nine mines in the vicinity (Camplin 1984). After the 1930s Peabody Coal Company bought everything and began surface mining operations. Those mines played out and now the land is being reclaimed as wildlife management areas adjacent to the trail on both sides. Former haul roads that intersect with the trail are planned as mountain bike trails. There

was a recent effort underway to provide interpretive signs to highlight these sites and tell the area's history of mining.

Muhlenberg County's trail building story is an uncommon one: it is rare for a project championed by one or only a few people to get very far without a change in support at either the government or community level. But Judge Kirtley was a popular, charismatic leader in the county (and a Republican, which probably helped to sell the idea to conservatives who are generally more reluctant to support this type of project). I interviewed him on the trail (literally) one summer afternoon: we started out talking at the Greenville trailhead and since we didn't have our bikes, Judge Kirtley suggested we simply drive the length of the trail in his car because, after all, "I'm the Judge, it's not like I'll get a ticket!" So off we went driving down the trail right of way, waving at everyone along the way – no one was particularly surprised to see him driving there. This allowed us to see features along the way and it let him tell me the story of how each item came about; including the signs, ATV trails and compromises with that, the Boy Scout bird watching platforms, the other trailheads at Powderly and Central City, and neighboring businesses and homes.

The Muhlenberg County Rail Trail is instructive as an example of a trail project originally focused on recreational use, but is now focused on historic preservation, interpretation, and the addition of "historic themed" features as the trail has become a popular part of the community. Many trails around the country share a similar history in that they were preserved and converted for recreational use and their subsequent community support led to historic preservation and interpretation efforts.

## **Oldham County Greenway**

### **Introduction**

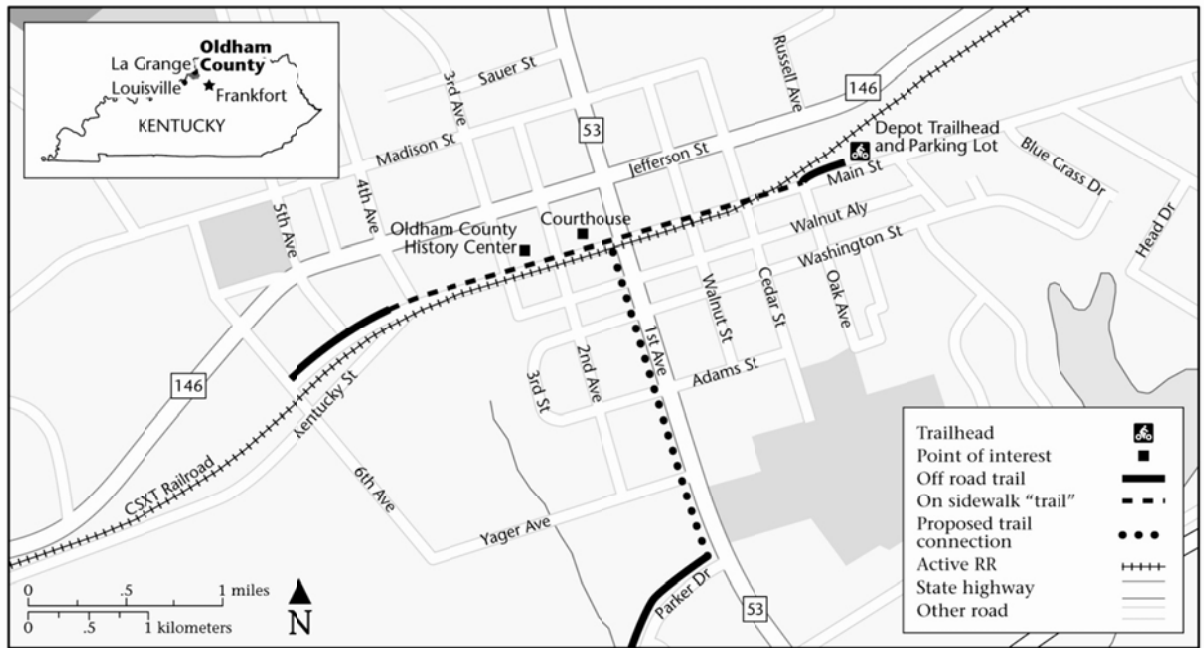
The Oldham County Greenway began its life as a right of way for the electric interurban train between the years of 1907 and 1935. That line ran from Louisville to LaGrange, a small county seat town (population about 5,700) the next county north east of Louisville. Oldham County is a rapidly suburbanizing community in the Louisville metropolitan area – its population has grown from 46,000 in 2000 to 58,095 in 2009; many of these residents live in subdivisions outside of the city limits (Uhde 2007, U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Population estimates for 2025 expect it to grow to over 86,000 people and by 2050 the Census Bureau estimates the county's population will be 116,000. The county and the City of LaGrange are actively anticipating this growth through planning initiatives, including designating land for parks, trails, and open space.

I chose this case study as a counterpoint to the Muhlenberg County Rail Trail. Though also in Kentucky, the Oldham trail shares very little in common with the Muhlenberg trail. Its setting in a suburban area is one important difference but the environment of community support for its development is also a key difference. The goals and function of the trail, and its future role in a planned network of trails, are also quite different from the Muhlenberg County example. The Oldham County Greenway helps to illustrate the range and variety of experiences relating to rail trails in Kentucky (and around the country). I also chose this trail because it is a project in progress. At the time I began my research they had just opened Phase One of the trail, a mere six-tenths of a mile of walkway. This case study has allowed me to study the process in action.

## **Background**

The Oldham County Greenway began as a plan to convert the former right of way of the old electric interurban railway into a pedestrian trail. Starting in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Louisville and Interurban Railroad (L & I RR) built lines radiating out from Louisville to surrounding communities. In 1911 they acquired the Louisville and Eastern Railroad (L & E RR), a company with lines to LaGrange, Shelbyville, and other small towns east of Louisville (Kleber 2001). After enjoying a peak of ridership during the 1910s and 1920s, the L and I RR was completely abandoned by 1935. The interurban system was well developed in Kentucky by this time; Louisville, Lexington, and Cincinnati had many lines radiating out to surrounding communities. It was a network that present-day regional transportation planners pine for as metro areas such as Louisville rebuild regional heavy and light rail systems. The interurban line to LaGrange shared a right of way with the Louisville and Nashville Railroad which is still active today as a CSXT freight line.

Figure 5.4: Map of Oldham County Greenways – Phase I, LaGrange



Map created by Mike Foster, University of Minnesota Cartography Lab

Phase I began in 2003 and included the restoration of the L&N Railroad depot in LaGrange and construction of the trail's first six tenths of a mile, connecting the depot to downtown. These six tenths of a mile of trail are made up of a small portion of new construction on the interurban right of way (on the west end of downtown and a short stretch on the depot property) and a portion of "trail" designated on to existing sidewalks (on the eastern end from the depot towards downtown). The new construction includes trail furniture such as limestone benches, signs, and bollards. The trail itself is paved and approximately six feet wide. The designated sidewalks are only three feet wide in some places and have not been recently reconstructed. Users must cross the street twice to follow the right-of-way of the trail. The "trail" right of way shares sidewalks in front of businesses downtown on Main Street and it is clear that users are not able to bicycle or roller blade on this portion of the trail (see Figure 5.2).

The depot restoration was a central focus for the project. It was not in derelict condition, but had been vacant for some time. The interior was reconfigured to accommodate the Chamber of Commerce offices and a small trailhead with a room for trail user information and restrooms. This depot served the Louisville and Nashville Railroad (now CSXT) during its passenger days. It stands adjacent to these still active railroad tracks. The exterior features a red tile hipped roof and stucco wall finish. Sanborn maps from 1915 seem to indicate that the depot was moved from its original location. It is unclear when this move happened and why it would be moved only a few hundred feet to the east and slightly south, away from the tracks. A move would also (usually) negate eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places, though this is probably not an issue since the structure is not individually nominated but is instead included as a contributing structure within a historic district. This move might explain why the depot no longer has its passenger platform and why the brick course around the base has also been replaced at some point, in a less than authentic way, so it looks a bit odd. The depot that served the Interurban railroad line stood at the west end of downtown. It was constructed in 1907 and was torn down in 1992 (NRHP 1988, Oldham Era 1994) (see picture below).





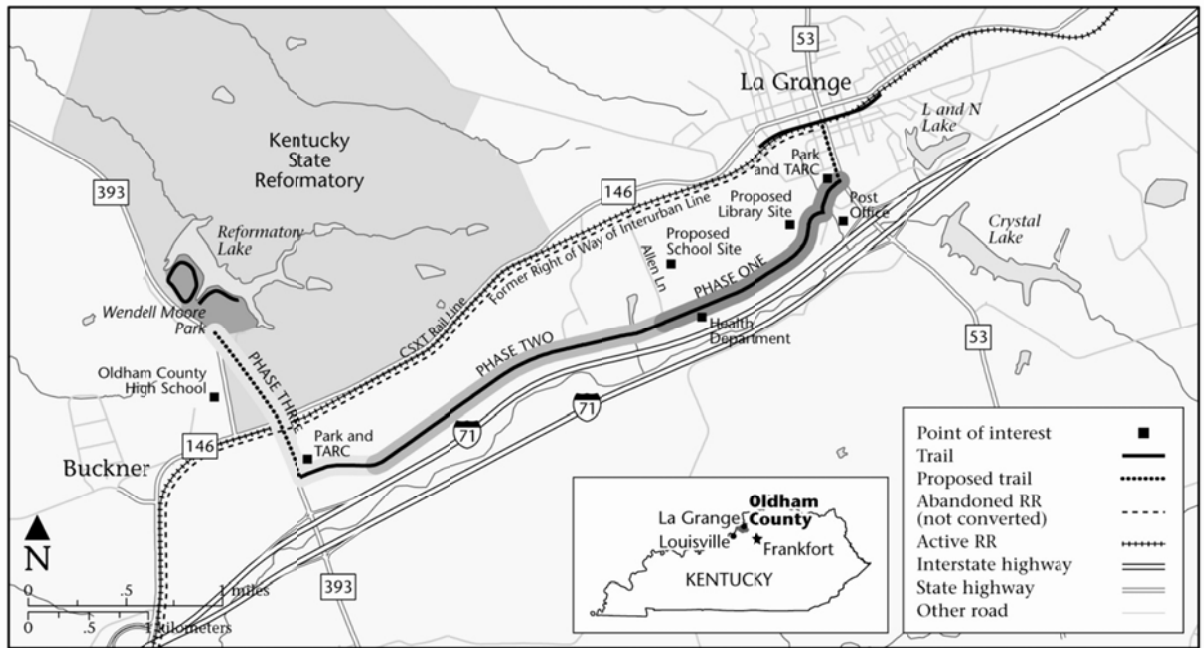
Figure 5.5: Trackside view of former L&N RR depot, LaGrange, now offices of the Chamber of Commerce and trailhead facilities for the Oldham County Greenway.



Figure 5.6: Interurban station with interurban train. Louisville and Nashville RR tracks in foreground, 1908.

Until 2008, the project was largely a proposal. Six-tenths of a mile of trail (of which only two-tenths was new, non-sidewalk construction) is hardly noteworthy!<sup>16</sup> Two other pieces of the trail network are now complete or in process in Oldham County (see Figure 5.3). The Commerce Parkway Greenway (a bike/pedestrian trail parallel to Commerce Parkway), Phase I, opened during the summer of 2009. This trail segment travels from First Avenue west to Allen Lane, a distance of approximately 1.25 miles. Phase II was scheduled for a fall 2009 completion date. This phase continues west from Allen Lane approximately 1.7 miles. Trail easements have been secured for Phase III which will extend the trail all the way west to KY 393 (see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.7: Map of Oldham County Greenways



Map created by Mike Foster, University of Minnesota Cartography Lab

<sup>16</sup> This trail is not even listed on the KYRTC website detailing completed rail trails in the state, though it may simply be an omission. Greenways for Oldham County has actively participated with Kentucky Rails to Trails Council.

These two pieces will add three miles of trails and there are five more phases (plus a bridge over Interstate 71) outlined in the Master Plan. Commerce Parkway runs south of LaGrange and eventually will connect to the downtown Interurban Greenway via sidewalks and trails. The ten foot wide trail shares a right-of-way with the parkway, a newer road planned as a connector to the area's growing (and yet to be built) suburban commercial and residential developments. Commerce Parkway is not a limited access highway but it is an alternative to the busy old state highway that runs between LaGrange and Buckner, parallel to Interstate 71. A new school and public library are proposed along Commerce Parkway and the trail will also provide access to two "Park and TARC" sites (TARC is the Transit Authority of River City, the public transit agency for the Louisville metro area) (Murner 2007).

The second project is the Wendell Moore Park trails. These are multi use loop trails in a park adjacent to the Commerce Parkway Greenway, eventually to be connected with the county's trail network. The trails in Wendell Moore Park are designed as a series of loops that connect amenities and provide users of all abilities a place for safe recreation. There will be a quarter mile loop, a half mile loop, and a one mile loop. The trails overlook Reformatory Lake (lovelier than the name implies!) and connect to a fishing dock and scenic picnic areas.

Greenway development in Oldham County began at the same time as massive residential growth. Nine thousand new residents moved to Oldham County between 2000 and 2007 (Uhde 2007). During those years the county issued at least 500 housing permits each year; in 2003 it issued 831 and in 2004 742 (Ellis 2005). The population of the county has been growing rapidly since the 1970s. The completion of I-71 through

Oldham County in 1969 was the true gateway to this growth; since its construction the county's population has quadrupled (Uhde 2007). The county was already a bedroom community to Louisville prior to the construction of the freeway, but its status as a commuter community exploded after the freeway. In 2000 the Census reported that 67 percent of Oldham County workers commuted to another county to work (Uhde 2009b, U.S. Census Bureau 2009). Nancy Theiss, director of Oldham County History Center, said that the opening of the interstate "was the real mark when Oldham County shifted from an agricultural community to an urban community" (quoted by Uhde 2009b). Between 1970 and 1980 the population in the county grew 89 percent, the highest growth rate of any Kentucky county in that period (Uhde 2009b, U.S. Census Bureau 2009). During the same time land in farms decreased from 107,356 acres to 60,024 acres (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).

But like the rest of the nation, Oldham County is suffering the effects of the housing bust and general recession. Since a peak in 2006 in the rate of population increase (then 3.07 percent) this rate has decreased to 0.6 percent in 2009 (Oldham Ahead 2010, based on Census data and estimates). The net population increase in 2009 (at 370 people) was the lowest since 1971. The decline in population growth lagged slightly behind the decrease in residential building permits. There, the peak occurred earlier in 2003 and has decreased steadily since then from 831 to only 111 residential building permits issued in 2009 (Census data aggregated on Oldham Ahead website). This number is the lowest number of permits recorded in the last thirty years.

The population growth has meant a struggle in the county to keep up with growing demands for schools, roads, sewer capacity, recreational amenities, and other needs. Many subdivisions are built in rural areas and lack connection to city sewer services. Sewer facilities in some places are overwhelmed and beyond capacity even as new subdivisions are built (Ellis 2005). One problem Oldham County has faced is the lack of businesses relative to housing. The county's tax base is dependent on housing and lacks the revenue that extensive commercial or industrial development would bring. The county is working on developing incentives to lure high paying, low nuisance employment, but it is difficult in the current economic realities.

It is a classic suburbanizing landscape, the type that smart growth activists rail against as being wasteful, imprudent, and downright unfriendly to both humans and the environment. All of the ingredients of "non-smart" growth are present in Oldham County: a lack of population density so that it is difficult to support infrastructure, disparate rural subdivisions not connected by anything but busy feeder roads, no accommodations for pedestrians, an entirely car dependent streetscape that is not accessible to the poor, the young, the old, or the carless (save for downtown LaGrange), no mixed uses, and one that threatens historic natural and cultural landscapes with destruction. The very rural character that draws people to the place is simultaneously being threatened by the arrival of those same people.

### **Creation**

Local residents began their efforts to convert this long-abandoned right of way into a recreational trail in 1997 by forming the organization "Greenways for Oldham County." When completed, the greenway will connect LaGrange to Pewee Valley, a

suburb of Louisville 13 miles away. From there they foresee it connecting into Louisville's network of trails. This project's focus is the depot whose restoration is the centerpiece of Phase I, though most community support for the project focuses on the potential of the trail to connect residents to community amenities and provide a site for safe recreation.

Greenways for Oldham County describe the beginning of their effort as a response to the need for better connectivity between communities (Greenways for Oldham County 2010). The citizen group began to work with county planning and zoning staff and local officials. In 1999 Greenways for Oldham County, with the sponsorship of Oldham County Fiscal Court, applied for and received Transportation Enhancements program funding for Phase I of their project. The project received \$320,000 in TE funds for the "construction of a .62 mile trail with landscape, signing, purchase, and rehabilitation of a historic L&N depot as trailhead" (National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse 2010). This funding was applied for under category eight: rail corridor preservation and trail development. In 2003 the project received an additional \$60,000 towards the rehabilitation of the depot. This round of funding was under category seven: preservation of historic transportation facilities. It is unclear why the first project was not under this category since it appears that most of that money went towards the purchase and rehab of the depot. In their original application document, Greenways for Oldham County indicated that this project fit into these categories: one (provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles), two (provision of safety and educational activities for pedestrians and bicycles), three (acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites), five (landscaping and other scenic beautification), six

(historic preservation), seven (rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation facilities), and eight (preservation of abandoned railroad corridors). The group chose category seven as the primary one for the project, but was awarded the money under category eight. My suspicion is that this change happened at the state level, in order to make it look like they were actually funding trails or to otherwise satisfy some requirement of the Governor's office, which was primarily in charge of the TE program at that time. The two largest items in the project's proposed budget related to the acquisition and rehabilitation of the depot: \$190,000 for land acquisition and \$45,000 for historic structure rehabilitation (these numbers are just the federal portion and do not include required local match funds of at least 20 percent).

Greenways for Oldham County and the Oldham County Fiscal Court cooperatively hired a private landscape architecture firm to develop an interurban greenway master plan for the project, which was released to the public in 2003. Oldham County Planning and Zoning and the Oldham County Fiscal Court also commissioned a county Bike, Pedestrian, and Greenways Master Plan in 2008, completed by consultants Brandstetter Carroll Inc. The County plan includes more than just the interurban and added plans for a network of pedestrian and bicycle facilities (Foster 2008). The Interurban route between LaGrange and PeWee Valley remains "the 'backbone' of the Oldham County Greenway's vision" (OCPZ 2008). This backbone essentially follows the old interurban route, but the actual right of way was rejected for the trail after the completion of an environmental study (Kissel 2005). This study found that steep slopes and issues with gaining easements would make the interurban route unfeasible. The chosen right of way includes sites already owned by the county or the City of LaGrange

to avoid property issues and to save a larger proportion of funds for construction. In 2008 the County Planning Commission approved the plan with a vote of 13-0.

The process of writing the 2008 master plan involved a significant amount of citizen participation in the planning process. The consultants held review meetings, public workshops, worked with a citizen steering committee, and completed a community attitude and interest survey. They also co-sponsored a Greenways Summit in 2007 where 29 local and regional agencies, non-profits, and private companies presented as stakeholders in the trails planning process.

The greenway project enjoys strong support in local and county government, among community groups such as the Lions' Club, and among citizens of the area. Evidence of this widespread support is that Paul Clinton, president of Greenways for Oldham County, was honored as the grand marshal of the county's 2003 summer celebration, Oldham County Day. The theme of that year's celebration was "Green Paths to Preservation" and it highlighted the potential of greenway projects in preserving historic resources. Greenways for Oldham County has also been a past recipient of money raised at fundraising events associated with Oldham County Day.

In addition, Clinton stated he never heard a word of opposition to the project (as of 2004) – in public meetings or anywhere else. But that didn't mean the project moved forward quickly. The organization's issue was not with community opposition, or even with government opposition, but with a lack of support at the county level. The project was not opposed; it was just "not a priority" to the Judge Executive. Clinton expressed frustration at the frequent new Judge Executives who "fired all the old staff and reappointed new staff." Each time he and the Greenways for Oldham County group had



to re-explain the project and “re-educate” the newcomers. This slowed progress significantly. Since 1997 Oldham County has had three judge executives: John Black (D): elected in 1992 and served two terms; Mary Ellen Kinser (R): elected in 2002; and the current Judge Executive Duane Murner (R): elected in 2007 (but not running for re-election in 2010). Murner appears to be a strong supporter of greenways. Greenways for Oldham County describes him as “a longtime supporter of trails” and of their organization (GOC 2010). The Fiscal Court’s Oldham County Vision Council (commissioned by J. E. Murner) identified trails, greenways, and parks as amenities that the county needs to plan for and fund (Troutman 2007).

The Oldham County Greenway is representative of other trail projects that have as their focus a historic structure or building. The Louisville and Nashville depot (circa 1910) was listed as a contributing building in the Central LaGrange Historic District’s nomination to the National Register of Historic Places in 1988. This structure is a rallying point for the community and an icon for the project. This trail will eventually become a project that focuses on recreation and transportation as well as historic preservation when built out to its full extent.

Paul Clinton (2004) related the story of how the depot became part of the project: “It had a for sale sign. It was fate.” It was his idea to add it to the grant and to use one room of the building as a trail head. He couldn’t say for sure if the addition of the depot helped them get the grant, but staff at the state transportation cabinet seemed to think it was an important factor. Though Clinton says he was not told by anyone he needed to include the depot to get the grant, in his opinion, up to that time, Transportation

Enhancement funded projects “were all buildings.” The rules, however, state the money is primarily for non-motorized transportation, for trails.

The first phase of the Oldham County Greenway began in downtown LaGrange. In many ways the town’s form is like many other small towns in Kentucky. Its focus is a classic courthouse square. The historic core, including the commercial area, some residential districts, the courthouse, and some religious and transportation landscapes, is on the National Register of Historic Places as the Central LaGrange Historic District (nominated in 1988). It contains many buildings dating from 1840-1938 (City of LaGrange 2007). The city is an active participant in Kentucky’s Main Street program, designed “to encourage downtown revitalization and economic development within the context of historic preservation” (KY Heritage Council 2010). LaGrange is also a “Preserve America” community – this is a federal program instituted in 2003 (or was, if the program’s funding is cut for FY 2011 as is proposed). A Preserve America designation is largely a ceremonial honor to recognize excellence in historic preservation, but it also allows participant communities to apply for grant funds.

What is unusual about LaGrange is the place of the railroad both literally and figuratively in the city. The CSXT freight line runs directly down the middle of Main Street, through the historic downtown, and past the courthouse square. Up to thirty slow freights rumble through every day just feet from the front doors of small shops and cafes.



Figure 5.8: A train passes “Kaelin’s Trackside Restaurant” in LaGrange



Figure 5.9: A train runs down Main Street, LaGrange

LaGrange had only been in place for about twenty years when the Louisville and Frankfort Railroad was platted down Main Street in 1847. At that time, railroad engines

and cars were at a much smaller scale; some were even still pulled by horses. This line was an extension of the very first railroad built in Kentucky from Lexington to Frankfort (begun in 1831). Later in the nineteenth century this line was absorbed into the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. By 1851 the rail connection between Lexington and Louisville (and the Ohio River) was complete (Connelly and Coulter 1922). It is almost certain that the LaGrange's decision makers in the 1840s could not foresee the impact of a future busy freight line right through the center of town. The town continues to deal with the consequences of this decision and is working with the railroad on safety improvements and noise reduction measures.

## **Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary**

### **Introduction**

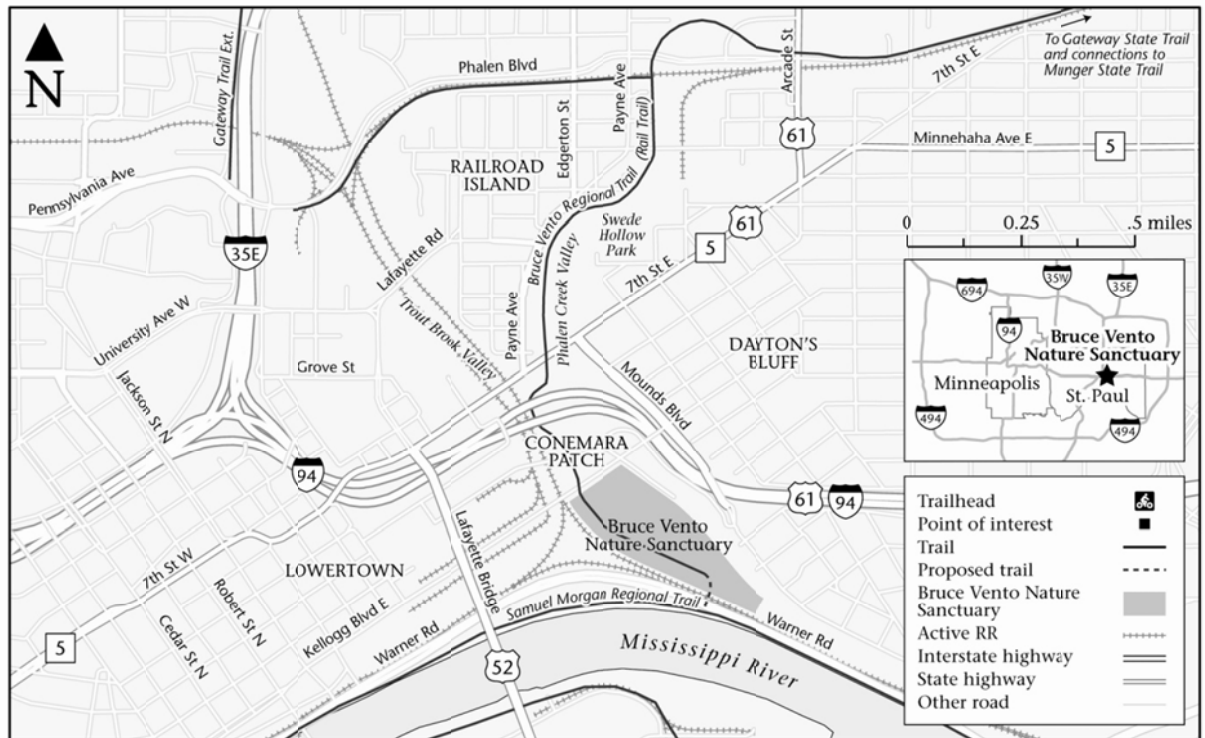
The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary is located along the Mississippi River, adjacent to downtown St. Paul, Minnesota. It is separated from surrounding neighborhoods by freeways, active railroad corridors, bluffs, and a vast area of abandoned industrial land. The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary creates a new point of connection for pedestrians through trail segments. Downtown St. Paul, local neighborhoods, and the extensive local and regional trail systems in the Northeast metro (including a trail that travels 174 miles to Duluth) connect through the Vento hub (see Figure 5.4). The trail was named for the late congressman who served the interests of Minnesotans on a variety of environmental and outdoors issues.

This trail project is unique in that it incorporates a rails to trails development, attends to historic preservation of remnants of the industrial landscape, attempts to re-establish the natural, native ecosystem of the site, and focuses on the sacred significance

of various sites to local Native American groups. The impetus for the project began at the citizen level with Friends of Swede Hollow (a volunteer community organization) and grew to include support from local, state, and federal government and non-profit sources. The public was involved in the planning and development process and continues to be involved in steering committees and volunteering at the site.

I chose the Bruce Vento trail as a case study because it focuses on both historic-features and recreation/transportation and includes aspects of environmental education and remediation. I also chose it as a counterpoint to the Kentucky case studies. The Minnesota story is quite different in terms of public opinion of trails, state and local support and funding for trails, its history of trail development, and in the current number of rail trail miles on the ground. I think the Vento Sanctuary is representative of a project that really works because of the way it developed through community support and there are many lessons that can be applied to other projects in the future.

Figure 5.10: Map of Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary area



Map created by Mike Foster, University of Minnesota Cartography Lab

But the Bruce Vento trail also fits into the general selection criteria that I used for my other case studies: it was an abandoned rail corridor that was redeveloped as a trail and funded at least partially through Transportation Enhancement funds. In 2006 this trail project received \$1.1 million in TE funds under the pedestrian and bicycle facilities category. I found it odd that despite this fact, three of the key steering committee members I interviewed (Sarah Clark, Carol Carey, and Anne Ketz) did not view the place as a rail trail, even though they are each intimately aware of its railroad past. I suppose this may be because they applied for the TE funding category of “pedestrian/bicycle facilities” and not “preservation of an abandoned railroad corridor.” They each seemed to think of the place as more of a nature area than a trail in and of itself.

## **Background**

The site, most of which was owned by Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, included twenty-seven acres of abandoned rail yards. One of the largest rail road maintenance yards in the Midwest, much of this yard had been used for rail car maintenance and cleaning in addition to fuel and other storage (Metropolitan Council 2008, Terrell and Vermeer 2004). Originally, the site was where Phalen Creek and Trout Brook came together and flowed into the Mississippi River; a large wetland area fed by creeks and natural springs. But by the 1970s, when the railroad pulled out, the site was a brownfield suffering from contaminated and compacted soils and an abundance of invasive species (Karlson 2004, Clark and Middleton 2008).

The area around the Vento Sanctuary was significant to the Hopewell people, a Native American culture who called the region home thousands of years ago. Burial mounds, a few of which remain preserved in Mounds Park at the top of Dayton's Bluff, are one of the only remnants of their presence there. Dakota groups still present in Minnesota trace their ancestry to the Hopewell peoples and also hold the area of the Vento Sanctuary in high significance spiritually and culturally (Monks 2006). Wakan Tipi, a natural cave central to Dakota creation mythology and used ceremonially for generations, is found on the eastern edge of the Vento Sanctuary. This cave contained many carvings of symbolic figures (Terrell and Vermeer 2004). In 1680, Father Louis Hennepin, a French priest and explorer, landed at the site with Dakota representatives (Anfinson 2003). After Jonathan Carver, a British explorer, "discovered" Wakan Tipi in 1767, it was renamed Carver's Cave and remained an important landmark for early European explorers and settlers.

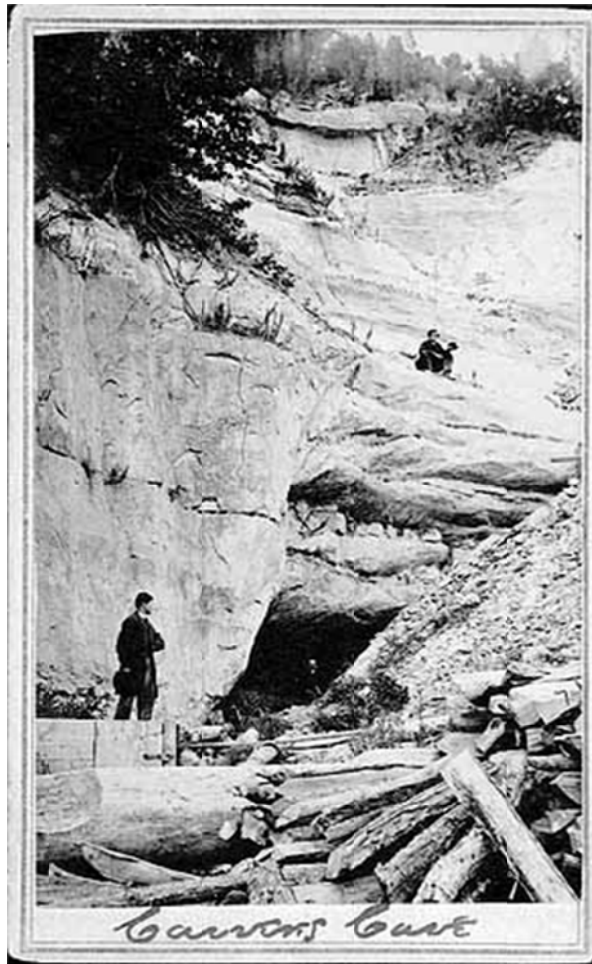


Figure 5.11: Carver's Cave ca. 1875  
Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

Early settlers of St. Paul began to use the area for industry (mainly breweries but also sawmills) and residences in the 1850s (Terrell and Vermeer 2004). Historical and archeological research on the site revealed that a complex of beer brewing, aging, and storage facilities existed there in the second half of the nineteenth century in addition to a few homes and boarding houses serving the brewery employees. The North Star Brewery made use of the natural sandstone caves in the bluffs and carved out larger caverns from these openings for beer storage (Monks 2006). German immigrant Jacob Schmidt bought the brewery in 1884. After a fire in 1900, he relocated to the West Seventh neighborhood



(Historic St. Paul no date and Milburn 2006). Schmidt's Brewing Company grew to become one of the state's venerable brewers and was a fixture in the neighborhood for over 100 years.

Starting in 1862, this site has been shaped by railroads. In 1857 the Minnesota & Pacific Railroad Company was chartered to lay tracks from Stillwater on the St. Croix River (Minnesota's eastern boundary), through St. Paul, St. Anthony (which later became Minneapolis), and west to Breckinridge (located on the Red River) (Veenendaal 1999). After much difficulty, the M&PRR never got past grading the line and laying some ties. The railroad was reorganized and refinanced as the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (SP&P RR). In 1862 this company completed the first ten miles of track from St. Paul to St. Anthony. This line began in downtown St. Paul, along the river levee, traveled east towards what was to become the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and traveled northwest up the Trout Brook stream valley towards St. Anthony (Milburn 2006, Veenendaal 1999). This was the first railroad in St. Paul and the first railroad in Minnesota. The SP&P RR went on to become part of the Great Northern Railroad empire (of James J. Hill fame).

In 1872<sup>17</sup> the Chicago and St. Paul Railroad became the first rail line built on what is now the sanctuary (Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific RR 1968, Woolworth and Woolworth 1980). While it was ten years after Minnesota's first rail line, it was significant because it was only Minnesota's second rail link to the national network (Veenendaal 1999). Just a few years prior to these connections (the first came in 1867), goods and passengers made the trip to St. Paul via river boats on the Mississippi (or,

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<sup>17</sup> Construction ranged from 1869-1872 – Veenendaal (1999) said it was finished in 1870; the railroad said 1872; Woolworth (1980) said construction was going on in 1869.

more rarely, overland) and then were transferred to the rail network (Veenendaal 1999). This line went on to become the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, then the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (CMSt.P and P RR), known as the “Milwaukee Road”. In the 1970s this line became part of the Soo Line family as that company absorbed the struggling Milwaukee Road. Branching north up the Phalen Creek corridor was the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad. By the early years of the twentieth century the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railway (CB & Q RY) ran east along the river parallel to the CMSt.P and P RR (Veenendaal 1999).

In 1970 the Northern Pacific Railway, the Great Northern Railway, the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway Co. (SP&S), and the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railway consolidated to become what is now known as the Burlington Northern (BN) (Veenendaal 1999, BNSF 2010). In 1995 BN merged with the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway (AT & SF) to become the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company (BNSF) (BNSF 2010). It was from the BNSF that the city of St. Paul purchased the abandoned rail yard that became the sanctuary.

During its time as an active railroad yard, the Vento site was anything but a peaceful sanctuary. At its peak dozens of parallel tracks ran here (Curtice and Annan 1908, Hopkins 1916). Railroad employees cleaned and serviced train cars at the yard. At the unwheeling shop they removed, rebuilt and reinstalled wheels. It was a noisy, dangerous place in constant motion. There was a Northern Pacific Railway “coach unwheeling shop” and two long rows of buildings called “coach yard buildings” and “commissary” buildings (Sanborn Map Company 1926, MN Transfer Railway 1930). These buildings, one belonging to the Northern Pacific Railway, the other to the

Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Sault Ste. Marie Railway (Soo Line) included a carpentry and paint shop, electricians' shop, carpet cleaning areas, storehouses, an ice house, a lunchroom for workers, and coal and oil storage (Sanborn Map Company 1926). This rail yard was just one piece of a much larger area of rail yards serving the passenger depot in downtown St. Paul and freight operations from the region. A larger yard still operates just down river, and several other yards were developed up Trout Brook and along the important rail corridor between St. Paul and Minneapolis. These rail yards speak to the centrality of the Twin Cities as a regional railroad hub for both freight and passengers.

Much of the original floodplain was altered by extensive filling, leveling, raising, and cutting back of the bluffs in order to expand the rail yard. During this time, much of Wakan Tipi (Carver's Cave) was lost by the destruction of the bluffs (Anfinson 2003). The first railroad on the site, the Chicago and St. Paul Railroad removed the face of the bluff around Wakan Tipi's entrance around 1869 during construction of their line (Woolworth and Woolworth 1980, citing 8/24/1869 article in *St. Paul Dispatch*). The entrance was obscured by rock falls and it was briefly re-opened in 1913 for tourism purposes, but these enterprises never prospered. In the 1970s the cave was studied again and steel doors were placed on the opening to protect the cave from vandals and "explorers" (Woolworth and Woolworth 1980). Archeological studies in 2003-2004 estimate approximately twenty feet of fill at the site – deeper near the river and shallower near the bluffs (Terrell and Vermeer 2004: 9). The river's edge had been pushed back more than five hundred feet by 1940 through fill projects to expand the rail yard (Pitz 2001). In addition, the creeks that flowed to the river were confined to sewer tunnels.

After adjacent freeway construction in the 1950s the area was further altered from its original topography.

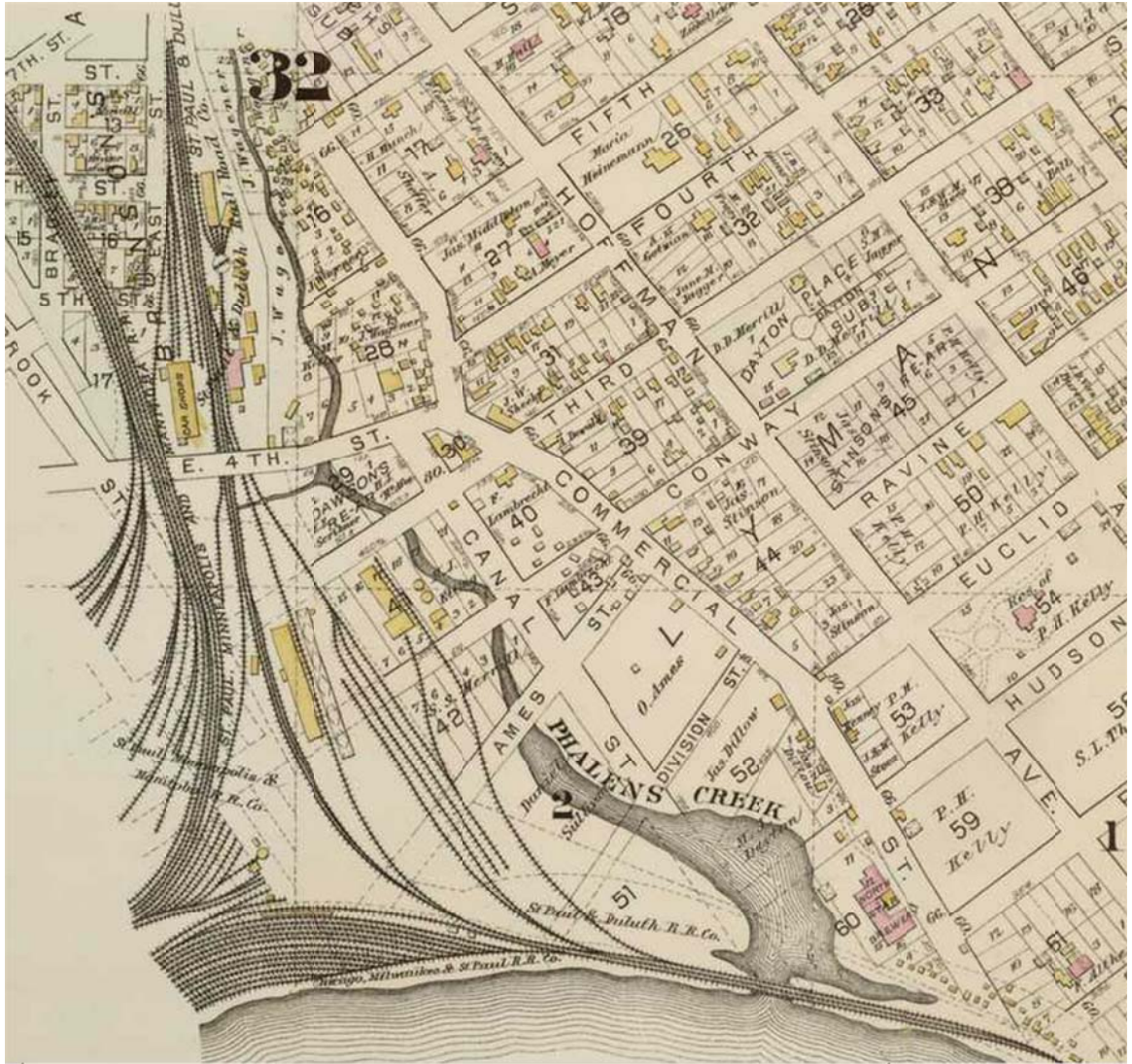


Figure 5.12: Map showing Phalen Creek’s wetlands in the river flood plain (Hopkins 1885).

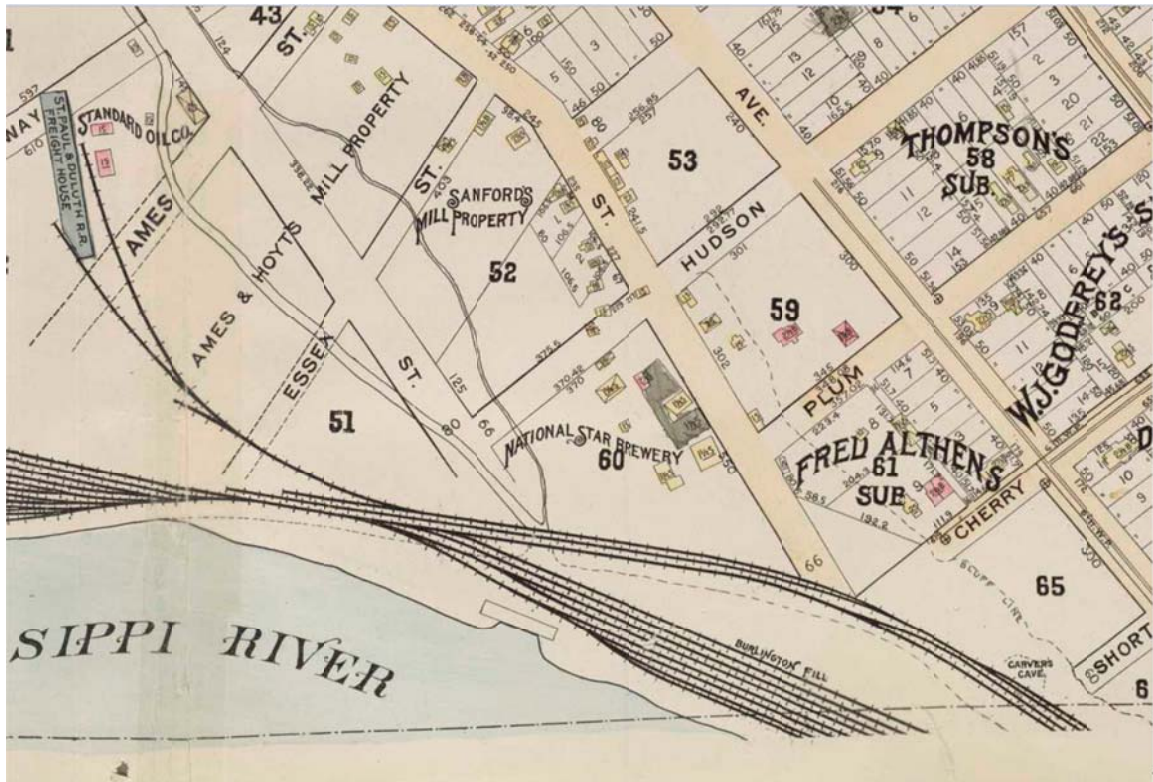


Figure 5.13: Bruce Vento Sanctuary area, ca. 1892. Here you can see the expansion of the rail yard where it says “Burlington Fill” (referring to Chicago, Burlington & Quincy RY). Everything south of the dotted line is fill; the dotted line denotes the original shoreline of the Mississippi River. Carver’s Cave is also denoted here in the lower right corner. At this time the Brewery was still operating on the site (Donnelley 1892).



Figure 5.14: Rail yard on Vento Site, ca. 1925  
Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society



Figure 5.15: Rail yard on Vento Site, ca. 1940  
Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society



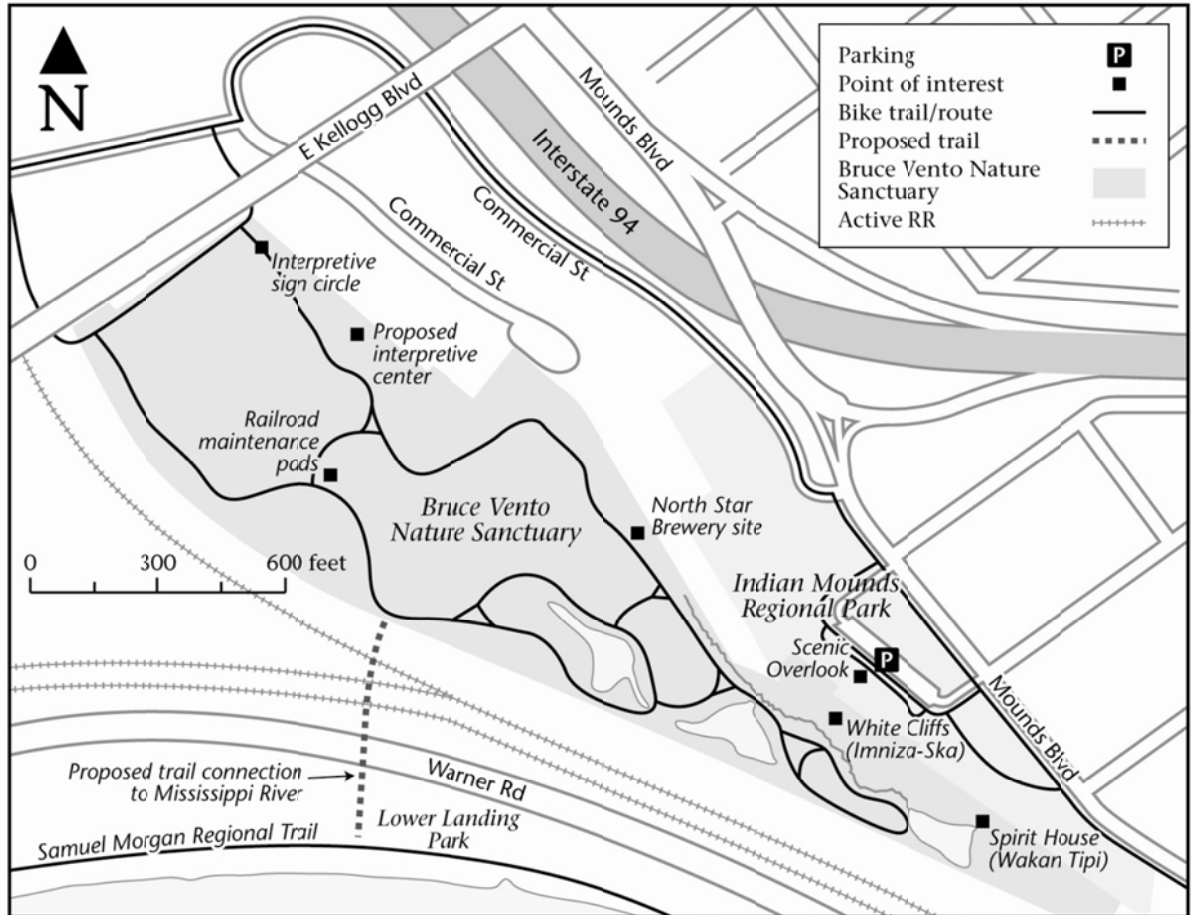
Figure 5.16: Car cleaners at site (Standard Oil Co. building still stands at site), ca. 1930  
Photo courtesy Minnesota Historical Society

Following the fortunes of railroads around the nation, this rail yard declined in its importance and necessity by the 1970s. The rail yard was abandoned then and by the 1980s most of the tracks and structures had been removed (Pitz 2001, Ramsey County Soil and Water Conservation District). Burlington Northern Santa Fe retained ownership of the site, but did little to maintain it. As a result, for more than twenty years it was victim to vandals, illegal dumping of garbage and other wastes, a site of homeless encampments, and it became overgrown with tenacious invasive species and weeds (the only things that could survive on such degraded and compacted soil). There was extensive pollution of the soil from years of heavy petrochemical use relating to the railroad cleaning, fueling, and repair operations (Clark 2009, Monks 2006).

The City of St. Paul acquired the property in 2002 at a cost of \$2.17 million (Metropolitan Council 2008). Opened to public use in 2005, today the site contains a loop trail that links the parking area to the different areas of the nature sanctuary. This 1.5-mile new trail now connects eighty-five miles of regional trails (Pitz 2001). The Bruce Vento Regional Trail, to which the Vento Sanctuary connects, sees nearly 120,000 users annually. The Sam Morgan Trail (along the river, on the other side of the active BNSF tracks from the sanctuary) sees approximately 189,000 users annually. A pedestrian bridge over the railroad tracks will eventually connect these two regional trails through the Vento Sanctuary. The Metropolitan Council estimates that trail use could rise by 25 percent when the connection is completed (2006 data, Metropolitan Council 2008).



Figure 5.17: Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary site map



Map created by Mike Foster, University of Minnesota Cartography Lab

At the west end of the sanctuary are a parking area and the entrance which is encircled by interpretive signs telling the story of the place. Visitors can follow the gravel trail past small ponds, up the hillside through the oak savannah, along the bluff to explore the three cave openings, and to examine the remnants of the railroad and brewery industries. Hundreds of new trees have been planted and the land has been reseeded in native plantings (Clark 2008). There are six distinct biomes represented there: floodplain forest, dry prairie, oak savanna, oak woodland, bluff prairie, and spring-fed stream and wetlands (Lower Phalen Creek Project 2008) (see Figure 5.5). The caves that were

associated with the brewery are viewable through iron grates. Wakan Tipi is set back quite a distance behind a pond and its opening is secured with a heavy steel door. The drainage in the sanctuary is designed, in part, to serve as rain gardens that filter water back to the river. It also serves to protect the caves from unauthorized entry as they each have a pool at their entrance.

Several parallel active rail lines continued to operate on the river side of the site. Between these tracks and the river, Warner Road was constructed, making use of the vast expanse of fill here. A chain link fence separates the area from the active rail corridor. Between the active tracks and the concrete slabs that remain from rail car maintenance days, the visitor can imagine what it was like to stand in the middle of an active rail yard. Indeed, the site is very popular with railfans (railroad and train enthusiasts) for watching and photographing trains (it was rated the number one spot in the Twin Cities for train watching by *Trains* magazine in 2006). The active tracks still belong to BNSF, but many other regional and national carriers use the tracks including Amtrak. It is a truly multi-modal site: railroad tracks, surface roads, interstate highways, barge traffic on the river, and pedestrian/bicycle trails all converge here.

From the photo below, one can get a sense of the scale of the former operations on the site. The thin parallel white lines in the middle of the sanctuary are long concrete runways that ran between railroad tracks and were part of the rail car maintenance and repair facilities. One runway was left intact at its full length. Parts of some of the others were left to give visitors a sense of their extant, but many were removed as part of the ecological remediation effort. The second picture (1985) shows the full extent of the

concrete slabs. That photo was taken after the tracks were removed from the rail yard but before it became extensively overgrown.



Figure 5.18: Vento Site aerial view, 2006



Figure 5.19: Vento Site aerial view, 1985. Here you can see the full extent of the concrete train servicing slabs. Courtesy of Ramsey County Soil and Water Conservation District.

A large abandoned industrial building dominates the vista. This building was acquired by the St. Paul Park and Recreation Department from the Trust for Public Land (who bought it from a private developer). They hope to reuse the structure as an interpretive center for the trails and sanctuary through a brownfield redevelopment grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency. In the railroad days, the building was owned by the Standard Oil Company and used for fuel storage. Developers proposed to convert this building into housing as part of a larger development, but ultimately this proposal was not approved because it was ruled incompatible with the Nature Sanctuary. Planning for the proposed interpretive center is ongoing in cooperation with the steering committee and community stakeholders.



Figure 5.20: Former Standard Oil building at Vento site; proposed for redevelopment as interpretive center and commercial space.

## **Creation**

The core group of citizen-advocates for the Vento site that eventually formed the steering committee came from the Friends of Swede Hollow, a local neighborhood group. Swede Hollow is just upstream along the old Phalen Creek (now buried in storm drains) and railroad route (now abandoned). This valley was home to succeeding generations of immigrants to St. Paul: first Scandinavian, but later from elsewhere in Europe and finally from Mexico. In the 1950s the hollow was cleared of its substandard houses (there was no sewer service to the area). By the 1980s the valley was threatened by a road project. Neighbors formed the Friends of Swede Hollow group to resist this threat. The group worked with the St. Paul Garden Club and preserved the hollow as a park. Over the years the group was active in cleaning up the site, interpreting its history, planting native plants, leading tours, creating guidebooks, and advocating. The Friends group was affiliated with (and indeed shared many members with) the Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhood Association, the official neighborhood group.

By the early 2000s the Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhood Association was working on various efforts to address greenspace and planning issues. One idea was to someday daylight (remove it from its sewer tunnel confinement back to an above-ground path) Phalen Creek and reconnect the neighborhood to the river. Part of the creek's original route went through the site that was to become the Vento Sanctuary. At the same time, the then mayor of St. Paul, Norm Coleman, began initiatives to reconnect the city to the Mississippi riverfront through new development, restoration, parks, etc. (Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework, 1997). The convergence of these two ideas allowed the group to pursue the project; without this timing Carol Carey, a neighborhood

resident and chair of the Vento project's Steering Committee, said it would have just "looked like a kooky idea" (2009).

Another development enterprise underway on the Eastside of St. Paul at the same time as the Vento Sanctuary was the Phalen Corridor redevelopment project. This project began as a way to address the industrial blight, lack of jobs, abandoned industrial facilities, poverty, and need for housing and commercial development in the area. A formerly central but now much diminished railroad corridor was converted into a parkway and adjacent brownfield sites were redeveloped. Now the corridor is home to the road, a pedestrian and bicycle trail, and the railroad (in some sections). It connects neighborhoods previously isolated by the rail corridor and contributes to the economic development and quality of life of the Eastside. Bruce Vento was also instrumental in securing funding and support for the Phalen Corridor (Milburn 2006).

Early in the planning for the Phalen Corridor, leaders were looking for a way to get the project started, to make the public aware of it, and encourage groups, individuals and businesses to be involved in it. They were surprised that the new bike trail on the abandoned rail corridor that ran through Swede Hollow Park became so important to the Phalen Corridor project. Allen Lovejoy, a planner with the city of St. Paul remarked "I never dreamed a bike trail would be a catalyst to start a redevelopment project. I mean really, a bike trail?" (Milburn 2006). The stakeholder committee for the rail trail became the starting point for the larger redevelopment project. Craig Johnson, an Eastside banker involved in this initial committee remembered thinking,

When you looked at all the jobs that had been down in that corridor, all the lives that had been supported by those businesses, I'm sorry, but a bike trail didn't seem to be enough! Those of us in the business community began to talk. We wanted more from that corridor – a lot more" (Milburn 2006: 55).

This is the framework in which the Vento project grew. The Eastside was a neighborhood that supported trails and parks, but expected them to be part of a larger enterprise to support development and an increased quality of life.

A key step to the success of the Vento project was the early interest of Dan Reyes, a project manager at the McKnight Foundation, a local philanthropic organization that funds the arts, family and children's programs, environmental initiatives, and numerous other local and international programs. Reyes took a sabbatical from his job to work on the first action plan for the project. He also secured funding for Citizens for a Better Environment, a group that provided early support and the first dedicated staff members to work on the Vento site. During this process Reyes also did some of the initial "matchmaking" between interested stakeholders and funders (Clark 2009, Carey 2009).

Reyes connected the staff working on the project with Weiming Lu, the president of the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation (now retired). This organization works in the Lowertown neighborhood of downtown St. Paul – the quadrant of downtown that contains many of the old warehouse buildings and the mostly vacant Union Depot train station. Weiming Lu spent years in urban planning in Texas, California, and Minnesota and brought both planning expertise and political savvy to the Vento project (Lee 2008). He became an instrumental member of the project's steering committee and started them on the road to a professionally packaged vision that was then marketable to the community, local, state, and national officials, and funding sources. Sarah Clark, current staffer with the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, saw the involvement of Mr. Lu and the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation as the "real birth" of the project.

At this time two part time staff people were brought on to manage the project. Sarah Clark oversees fundraising, outreach, planning, and grant writing and Amy Middleton is in charge of the on-the-ground ecological restoration aspects of the site. Sarah Clark related that it was “the continuity of permanent staff that really made a big difference in the success and progress of the project.” They wanted to be an asset to the city and help make things happen because “The community is really just nagging if they aren’t bringing resources to the table.” The resources the Vento staff brought included help in grant writing for various funding sources (Clark 2009).

The two staffers worked with two committees to keep the project on track: a technical advisory committee and a community advisory committee. Later, many of the participants on these committees became members of the project steering committee of the Lower Phalen Creek Project. Carol Carey stressed the importance of the involvement of these committee members because they became not just “involved” in the process but “invested” in the project. Some of these same groups became key implementation partners later on – including the Trust for Public Land, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and St. Paul Parks and Recreation Department. The “community involvement dovetailed to the agency piece” (the participation of government agencies and regional/national organizations); it was a “great marriage of a wild idea and a process that represented real grassroots community vision” (Carey 2009).

Groups from all adjacent neighborhoods participated in the process – they were asked to appoint representatives to join the technical and community advisory committees. These included Swede Hollow, Railroad Island, Lowertown, Dayton’s Bluff,



and Payne-Phalen (see Figure 5.4). The public was also invited to open houses and meetings along the way to participate in the process. During the planning for soil remediation there were a few federally mandated public meetings. The federal agency folks were surprised that people actually attended! Meetings are advertised through flyers, local email lists, and in the neighborhood newspapers. While public participation at regular steering committee meetings is welcomed, they save the big advertising for when they are at important decision points. Public clean-up days and Eco-Steward volunteer events at the site also have big turnouts from the public.

In 2001 consultants worked with the staff and committees to produce a vision document titled “A Community Vision for Lower Phalen Creek: Improving our Watershed, Revitalizing our Communities.” Through giving the project a title and an “official document” it made it more real for the community; it “ignited the idea that Wow! This could happen!” (Carey 2009).

After the project was well on its way to realization the steering committee formed. This committee includes members from the original technical and community advisory committees and represents the full spectrum of involvement in the process. And now, even though the site is nearly completed, already open to the public, and owned by the City of St. Paul, the committee is still active in “steering” the project. Carey relates several reasons for this involvement: to continue to push the agenda since, if it was only under city management, would be relegated to a list of many sites and projects; to maintain community control and ownership of the process; and because there is some mistrust of the public agencies that could take over management.

The four key foci of this committee are water quality, greenspace, trails, and community connections (both literally and figuratively). Trails were part of the plan not just for recreation's sake but for their community connections aspects. The missing trail connections – between the site and downtown, the river, and the adjacent neighborhoods – rallied people to interest and involvement. The need for connections resonated with local residents and the focus on connections and the nature sanctuary also was vital for obtaining funding for the project.

**Box 5.1: The members of the Lower Phalen Creek Project Steering Committee include (as of 2009)**

*Carol Carey, Chair*, Executive Director, Historic St. Paul. Former Executive Director, Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhood Association.

*Weiming Lu*, President, Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation (retired).

*Karin DuPaul*, Community Organizer, Dayton's Bluff Community Council, Upper Swede Hollow Neighborhood Association Board Member, Friends of Swede Hollow Board President, Dayton's Bluff District Four Board member.

*Chip Lindeke*, Partner, Rafferty Rafferty Tollefson Lindeke Architects, Inc.

*Paul Mohrbacher*, Community Relations Manager, Science Museum of Minnesota.

*Sarah Clark*, Lower Phalen Creek Project Staff, Project Manager

*Amy Middleton*, Lower Phalen Creek Project Staff, Project Manager

*Kristin Murph Dawkins*, East Side Neighborhood Development Company Board member, Friends of Swede Hollow Board member, Payne Avenue Business Association member.

*Christine Baeumler*, Assistant Art Professor, University of Minnesota, Vice President, Friends of Swede Hollow Board.

*Denny Thompson*, Planner, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Saint Paul Bicycle Advisory Board member, Friends of Swede Hollow member.

*Dan McGuinness*, Mississippi River Program Director, Audubon Society.

*Colleen Ashton*, Friends of Swede Hollow Board member, Mounds Park Association member.

**Lower Phalen Creek Project Partners**

Audubon Society

Capitol Region Watershed District

CapitolRiver Council

City of Saint Paul City Council

City of Saint Paul Division of Parks and Recreation

City of Saint Paul Office of the Mayor

City of Saint Paul Department of Public Works

City of Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development

Community Design Center of Minnesota

District 4 Dayton's Bluff Community Council

District 5 Payne-Phalen Planning Council

East Side Neighborhood Development Company

Friends of the Mississippi River

Friends of Swede Hollow

Great River Greening

Historic Saint Paul

Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation

Metropolitan State University

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Minnesota Department of Transportation

Minnesota Environmental Initiative

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

National Park Service Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

Phalen Corridor Initiative

Railroad Island Implementation Task Force

Ramsey County Board of Commissioners

Saint Paul Garden Club

Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation

The way the early years of the project played out proved to be very important to later success. By engaging so many people and agencies early on it created a truly strong

foundation and a good organizing principle. This foundation was put to the test when news of the project reached the community at large. A group looking for soccer field land heard of the site's parkland proposal and thought the site would also be good site for their needs. The steering committee did not see this as a compatible use for the site because it did not accomplish the ecological restoration goal. They used the connections they had in place and began lobbying any city, county, regional, state, and federal officials and agencies who had any interest or influence.

The soccer field proposal was defeated and the challenge served to energize the participants, focus the efforts, and spread the word and build support for the project at all levels of government. During the fight the Vento site supporters faced accusations of being "tree huggers" who thought "birds are better than people" for advocating protected habitat over soccer fields for kids. But in the end these accusations served to galvanize and focus the supporters' beliefs in the goals of the project. Carey, chair of the steering committee, pointed out that it was so important to have the coalition in place, full of talented experts and passionate locals, already working together so that when the challenge came, they were ready to work together and tackle the problem.

All of this happened before the property had been secured! It was still in private hands (Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway) and nothing was guaranteed. Before purchase was negotiated, the community steering committee had to complete plans for environmental remediation, ecological restoration, and Section 106 historical documentation (Clark and Middleton 2008). They also contracted with a consultant to work on the community vision plan for the site (completed the year before purchase).

Here again it was the staff's role that made the difference in providing the continuity necessary to keep the project going.

One of the project partners, The Trust for Public Land, assigned a development expert to work with Sarah Clark and an attorney to negotiate with the railroad. TPL worked for more than three years to negotiate the purchase. Much of the difficulty stemmed from the pollution on the site. The railroad was enthusiastic about having a polluted and almost certainly very expensive to remediate site off its hands, but they envisioned selling it to an industrial user who would not worry about the soil safety. The site was zoned for industrial use and two proposed uses were for a concrete truck transfer station and an asphalt recycling plant (Monks 2006). The city was also reluctant to become the new owner of such a polluted site, as much as they wanted it for a park. The Trust for Public Land was able to create a cleanup plan that utilized a combination of private and public funding and insulated both BNSF and the City of St. Paul from great expense. TPL also bought insurance against "unforeseen environmental problems" to further protect the interested parties (Monks 2006).

More than \$7 million in funds from federal, state, local, private, and non-profit group sources have made the Vento Sanctuary's development possible (Helms, 2007). Much of its development is because of not only broad governmental or financial support but also dedicated local stakeholders. Funding sources included money from the Metropolitan Council, Transportation Enhancements, the National Park Service, the US Environmental Protection Agency, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Metro Greenways Program, an earmark in the federal transportation bill in 2005, a variety of private foundations, nonprofits, and individual supporters.

One of the key steps in the success of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary was moving from community support to a community vision document to the adoption of this document into the official City of St. Paul Comprehensive Plan. In addition, the conservation agreement with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources further legitimized the project and led to its eventual success. Cooperation came from the National Park Service's Mississippi National River and Recreation Area to accomplish land acquisition in 2002.



Figure 5.21: A young hiker enjoys the trail through Vento's prairie area.

After the City of St. Paul purchased the site they hosted a trash clean up event where over 100 volunteers removed over 50 tons of debris. Because the site had been abandoned for decades it had become a major dumping ground for construction debris, trash, appliances, and all manner of other waste. After cleanup, soil remediation began which involved removing the top layer of polluted soil and trucking in several inches of

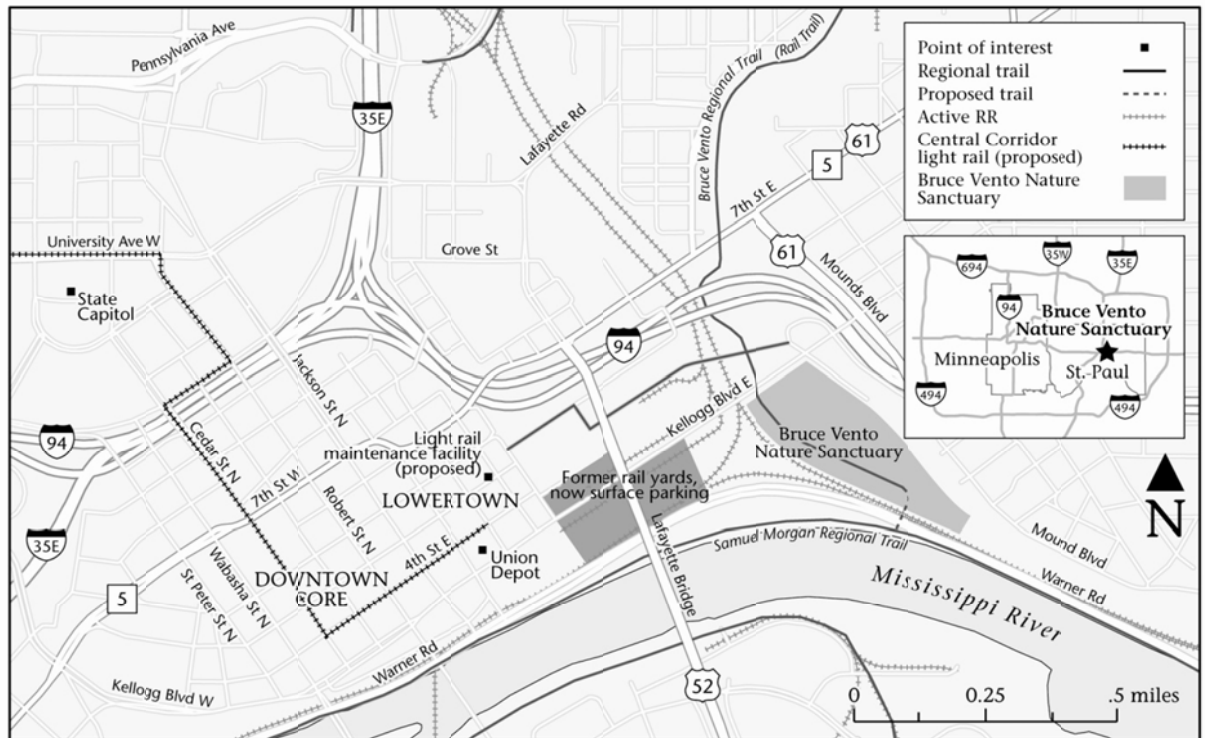
clean topsoil (Clark and Middleton 2008, Clark 2009). By spring of 2005 the soil remediation and site reconstruction was largely completed and the sanctuary opened to the public in May 2005.

The nature sanctuary is named after Minnesota Congressman Bruce Vento. He served twelve terms and was a faithful supporter of parks, trails, and environmental causes. After Bruce Vento's death in 2000 another member of congress, Martin Sabo, was able to secure the final funding in Vento's honor through the National Park Service to purchase the property (Monks 2006). The park became part of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.

Because of this federal funding the Section 106 process was initiated. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, required for all federally funded projects, examines potential impacts on historic resources and addresses plans to either avoid or mitigate those potential impacts. The Vento project team contracted the services of local historic resources consultant Anne Ketz and her company, The 106 Group. It was through this process that the committee and the community began learning about the history of the site.

The next steps for the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary include determining how to connect the site to the river, currently separated by a fence, an active rail line, and a road, and how to continue to connect the site to downtown and capitalize on development that may occur there as light rail comes to St. Paul. The city is moving forward to buy missing pieces, the "next big frontier" for the site (Clark 2009). Some of these missing pieces lie between the site and Lowertown and are adjacent to the new light rail maintenance facility (as yet undeveloped) (see Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.22: Map of Bruce Vento Sanctuary and Downtown St. Paul



Map created by Mike Foster, University of Minnesota Cartography Lab

Another frontier being explored is developing revenue-generating potential for the site, much like the Dodge Nature Center, another local natural area. Dodge is an “environmental education and habitat restoration organization” that hosts a preschool program, summer camps for children, facility rentals, birthday parties, farm tours, and educational programs for school groups. One idea was to differentiate the site from Dodge by focusing more on the historic aspects of the site instead of just the ecological.

This chapter fulfilled the first step in Schein’s (2009) methodological framework for examining cultural landscapes: a detailed history of the place. He writes,

what really matters is investigating particular landscapes – to understand how they have come to be, to wonder how they are received and lived in and through, to ask how and why they matter, and to figure out how they work. When looking at particular landscapes, details are important...(2009: 380).



Here we learned of how each of the three case study trail landscapes came to be, how they are used, what features they have, and what some of the obstacles and successes they had along the way to completion. We all understand the need to move beyond description to interpretation and analysis, but without description one cannot interpret or analyze. In the next chapter we move on to ask how and why each of these places matters in the lives of individuals and their communities and why that is important.

## **Chapter 6 : Values matter in landscapes**

In this chapter I will continue to work within the Schein's framework for examining landscapes by exploring the meanings that individuals and groups associate with places (2009). Schein suggests we ask "what the landscape means to the individual and collective identities of people who live in and through the landscape; interpreting cultural landscapes as unwitting autobiographies" (referring to Lewis 1979<sup>18</sup>). By unwitting autobiographies Lewis (and Schein) are referring to the way that landscapes tell the stories people tell about themselves, when they don't realize they are telling those stories.

It is important to remember why one would study cultural landscapes in the first place. One aspect of the answer to this question is that it is at the core of humanistic geographical tradition: the endeavor to discover the compelling stories of human connections to places and meanings built there that are at the center of human experience. But beyond just wanting to know these stories (a joy, in themselves) we seek to understand them in order to better understand the people who create and use the places that anchor the stories because maybe if we understand more, we can make places that are more useful or meaningful or likely for people to build connections to, in short, better places. Yi-Fu Tuan wrote that the humanistic geographer "will show how place is a shared feeling and a concept as much as a location and a physical environment. He [sic] can suggest means by which a sense of place may be enhanced" (1976: 275). This is especially true in planning contexts, whether for trails or historic preservation. Places matter because people matter.

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<sup>18</sup> Peirce Lewis wrote that "human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form" (1979: 12).

I addressed the conflation of the words “meaning” and “value” in Chapter 3, but it is important to revisit that point here. While I intended to keep them separate concepts, in the practice of interviewing and interacting with stakeholders, it became not only untenable to separate them, but the interviewees more commonly used the word value so I followed their lead. I found in archival materials too that the concept of “value” was much more commonly used. An off-shoot of that term was the word “matter” as in “how does this place matter to you?” The National Trust for Historic Preservation began a marketing campaign in 2009 called “This Place Matters” and members sent in photos of themselves in front of places that matter to them with a sign with that slogan printed on it (see Figure 6.1). These photos, and the accompanying descriptions, provided the basis for an extensive map-based website. In interviewing people, I sometimes explained the concept of “values based preservation” or just that values was a theme that ran through my research. But some participants used the word “meaning” or “meaningful” on their own without my using it first in reference to visitors’ relationships to the site (Ketz 2009). In written surveys I asked participants to tell me about “important places” in their communities. I purposefully left this open ended so that they did not think that I was only thinking of official historic sites or parks. It worked well because responses ranged from war memorials to trails to Wal-Mart and shopping malls.



Figure 6.1: The Ditto-Landsdale House in West Point, KY, entry into This Place Matters campaign. Photo taken by Christina Leuken, courtesy of National Trust for Historic Preservation.

This step helps us move from understanding what a landscape looks like – what features have been built, altered, lost, or reconstructed over time, and how people use them – to discovering what people and groups think about these places; how they understand them; how they are part of their lives; the ways they think they are important (or not); what kind of story the place tells about the people who use it or who created it; and what kind of story those people tell about the places. This step also ties into applications in the world of trails and historic preservation. Why should we ask what kinds of meanings and values people find in places and what should we do with that information once we learn it? Behind these questions is a set of meta-questions: Why do values matter? Why do they matter in historic landscapes? Why do they matter in trails landscapes?

Railroad corridors are places that play important roles in the lives of communities economically, spatially, and historically. They contain a wealth of historic fabric, as they usually pass through the core of towns, with key industries and businesses adjacent. They tell an important story about American landscapes, about transportation, settlement, urban morphology, business and industry. Railroads traditionally hold a lot of value, nostalgia, and lore, especially in places where trains no longer run, where the passing of the railroad was seen as a passing of the good old days. Active railroads are sources of annoyance and even danger (for noise, crossings, accidents with humans and animals), necessary for commerce (sought after by town boosters), or just hardly-thought-about parts of the landscape. After abandonment, the place of railroad corridors in communities often changed greatly. Residents over time came to ignore the corridors, fear them as places of crime, or complain about them as eyesores. Railroads converted into trails have been revalued through a new use as a site of community recreation and enjoyment of nature, but derive a good measure of value from their association with the railroad history, now translated through nostalgia to be defined in the quaint depots and picturesque bridges and tunnels.

These ideas assume that there is a way that landscapes and places can come to be valued by people and that the history of a place contributes to this value. (Glassberg 2001, Hayden 1995) Historic value of a place is one of a set of many values that intersect and overlap, increase and diminish. Some of these other values can include economic, social, personal, or political. (de la Torre 2002, Listokin et al 1998, Mason 2008) All of these values can be a factor in a preservation project such as a rails-to-trails conversion. There are many ways that a sense of the past is translated into values, and many ways that

those values can be deployed toward an end. These values, as they relate to a sense of the past or to an historic place, are played out on the landscape in different ways in different places by the numerous stakeholders who are part of a preservation or trail project.

### **Muhlenberg County**

The Muhlenberg County Rail Trail experience tells a story about how values attached to an historic landscape change over time and as its use is transformed. In this case study we see an example of how a change to a historic landscape – from dereliction to trail – changed the community and what they valued about the place. It shows how values for recreation and community connections, for economic growth and nature, and for health and wellness were not completely new to Greenville and Central City, but focused and intensified around the new trail. Especially in the case of recreation and health, new community values developed as a direct result of the development of the rail trail. Muhlenberg County is also an example of why values matter in trail planning. Their uphill public opinion battle could perhaps have been mitigated by working more closely with the public all along the planning process.

The abandonment of the former Illinois Central RR (then Paducah and Louisville RR) line between Central City and Greenville was tied to the decline of surface mining in the county. Muhlenberg County led the nation in coal production in 1964, 1969, and 1970, but after a peak in 1972, production has since been outstripped by Appalachian counties and especially the Powder River Basin of Wyoming (Camplin 1984, U.S. Energy Information Administration 2009). The primary customers along the line stopped production at their mines and railroads without customers are quickly abandoned! Central City is still served by a CSXT railroad line whose customers include local businesses and

the coal industry; the abandoned line was redundant in light of new mining circumstances in the Greenville/Beech Creek and Powderly areas.

The railroad was essential for transporting goods, people, and information in addition to its value on the coal industry. Other commercial enterprises relied on the railroad to move things in and out and it was the connection to larger regional centers such as Louisville or Paducah. The railroad was the center of town literally and figuratively, and the railroads were large employers themselves.



Figure 6.2: Railroad depot in Central City, KY  
Photo courtesy of Duncan Center Museum, Greenville, KY (n.d)



Figure 6.3: Passenger depot in Greenville, KY  
Photo courtesy of Duncan Center Museum, Greenville, KY (circa 1938)



Figure 6.4: “Mountain type Locomotive would haul 100 coal cars from Central City to Paducah for further distribution circa 1955” (from [www.muhenbergcountyky.com](http://www.muhenbergcountyky.com))





Figure 6.5: c. 1964 Peabody Coal Company (from [www.muhlenbergcountyky.com](http://www.muhlenbergcountyky.com), but also at Duncan Cultural Center)  
Machinery used to extract overburden in surface mining operations



Figure 6.6: Abandoned railroad corridor strewn with trash in Carter County, KY  
(I have no photos of Muhlenberg's corridor prior to trail development, but this is a similar scene)

The community gave little value to the corridor after the Paducah and Louisville railroad abandoned the line, except in its value as property and the salvage value of the stone ballast (the county earned \$70,000 from the sale of the ballast). It became an overgrown eyesore. Neighbors to the line dumped their garbage and junk in the right of way and allowed the backs of their properties to become tangled in weeds. Few saw the corridor as a potential asset to the community until the County Judge Executive learned of rails to trails and moved the idea forward. Once the trail was developed, the landscape quickly moved from devalued to valued. Within a very short period of time the trail became one of the most highly valued places in the community as a site for recreation, exercise, meeting with others, enjoying nature, and visiting historic railroad artifacts.



Figure 6.7: PAL caboose at Greenville trailhead.

### **The community's values: on its own terms**

The Muhlenberg County rail trail addresses the values of the community on its own terms – values of recreation and health and community connections. Kirtley says that through this project they are “meeting the needs of our community” and it’s the “nicest, feel good, quality of life project we’ve done.” The “on its own terms” perspective is important here. It’s not enforcing an outside idea of what recreation has to be (Kirtley calls this the “spandex super-fit crowd”) but it is whatever the community has wanted it to be (work boots, coveralls, overweight people, and Wal-Mart bicycles).

This principle of doing things “on their own terms,” without outside influence and interference, appears to be a common perspective in the county. A chapter on recent coal history (as of 1984) in a Muhlenberg County history book concluded “It would seem that after 162 years of operations and 610,000,000 tons produced, Muhlenberg Countians would not have to stand by idly while some far off misguided persons attempt to eliminate our major industry by closing the mines.” This chapter began with the heading “Environmentalists crippling coal industry” (Camplin 1984: 221). We can infer the influence of this perception on an idea such as rails to trails.

During the trail planning process strong opposition coalesced around ideas about private property rights, privacy, increased crime, and rural land use (agricultural interests wanted to convert the corridor to farm use to reconnect their properties). After the corridor was converted to a trail, the place became valued as an important location for the community. Kirtley traveled the state telling the story of how the community came around to support the trail – some people overnight, others over time. One regular trail

walker told him that her husband was one of the strongest opponents during planning, but she loves it now.



Figure 6.8: From elsewhere in central Kentucky, but indicative of the general attitude about private property rights in the state.

Ads in the local newspaper, the *Muhlenberg Leader-News*, testify to the value of the trail. One ad advertises a mobile home for rent, highlighting it is “adjacent to rails to trails walkway in Powderly” (MLN 1/24/01). Muhlenberg County is not home to numerous lavish subdivisions. Here you find a mix of modest houses and mobile homes, but these places enjoy a boost in property value from proximity to the trail in the same way that a grander home would, another example of the community’s values “on its own terms.” Another ad uses the trail as a landmark in explaining where its business is located: “Next to Clark's Appliance Across from the Walking Trail in Greenville” (MLN 4/18/01). This is an immense shift in value in just a few short years.

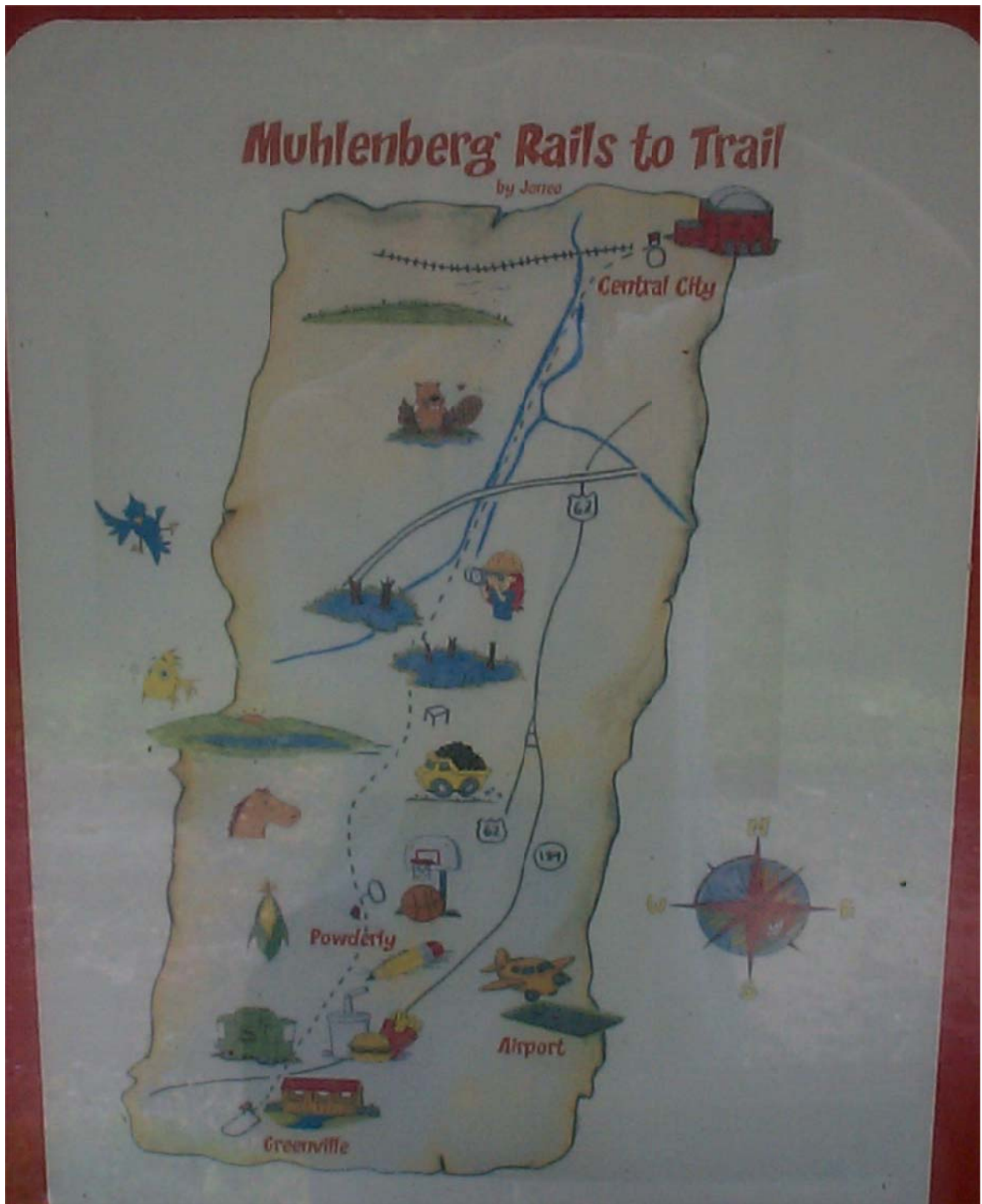


Figure 6.9: Community's views of what's important along the trail: a map that is posted at the trailheads

## **Recreation and wellness value**

Many local residents had no other safe place to ride their bikes or walk prior to the construction of the trail; rural roads in the area are narrow with no shoulder or sidewalks and are unsafe even for adults, much less children, to be pedestrians. One resident stated simply “I didn’t walk before the trail was built” (Carver 2004c). An elderly couple I interviewed at the trailhead said that they use the trail almost daily in the cooler months (even in the winter) but not as much when it’s hot. Over 90 percent of the trail users I interviewed listed “health” as their top reason for using the trail. The next most common responses were “fun” and “recreation” at 35 percent (combined). Some comments from the users surveyed show how much the trail is valued as a safe place to exercise. In response to the question “what is your or your family’s favorite part of the trail?” a user replied “you can walk without worry or cars!” Another responded “you can actually walk or bike and not worry about the traffic.” Ironically, several trail users complained about the speed and density of bicycle traffic on the trail as a hindrance to safe walking – another consequence of building out the trail at six feet wide instead of ten. An article in the local paper outlined how to begin an exercise regimen and concluded “Try rails to trails” (*Muhlenberg Leader-News* 2001c).

The recreation value of the trail is evident by the number of scheduled events. These include the March of Dimes fundraising walks, cross country team practices, a runners’ clinic sponsored by the local hospital in honor of National Physical Therapy month, and a community “Valentine’s Day Trail Walk” that involved walkers starting from both ends and meeting in the middle for hot chocolate and fellowship, to name a few. Kirtley often mentioned that doctors in the area prescribe trail walking to their

patients. A KET (Kentucky Educational Television) program called CommonHealth Kentucky featured the trail in an episode titled “Reducing obesity through activity.” Becky Keith, chairperson of the Muhlenberg County Rail Trail advocacy group and a nurse practitioner with the local public health department, spoke in this program of the value of exercise as the “fountain of youth” and the important role the trail plays in providing a safe place for local residents to exercise. In 2005, more than 400 people signed up in teams of four in a county campaign to “Get Moving, Start Losing.” This was a campaign to lose a collective 1000 pounds in the county and centered on trail walking.

### **Community connection value**

The rail trail serves as both a physical connection between Greenville and Central City, and as a way to connect people within the community to each other. Daily use of the trail is common in the community; many people have an evening or after-work routine that involves walking the trail and meeting with friends and family. On-trail interviews in 2004 found that 78 percent of respondents used the trail at least once per week; 28 percent stated that they used the trail at least once per day. Judge Kirtley related in a talk at the KY Trails and Greenways Conference (2004) that there are groups of moms who meet to walk the trail with their babies in strollers. There are seniors groups who meet for coffee and trail walking. The trail is valued not only as a place of recreation but as a place of connecting with people – it’s the small town café in motion. Keith Laughlin, president of the Rails to Trails Conservancy, called rail trails “a new kind of front porch” (2004). A group of eight women, interviewed in the local newspaper, explain how they meet to walk at the trail “at least five days a week” and cite the trail’s

safety, easy access, and no-cost exercise as primary benefits in addition to being able to “catch up with what’s going on with everyone” (Carver 2004).

The trail serves the full range of ages in the community from babies to the elderly because of its accessibility. One trail user surveyed on site in 2004 remarked that his family liked using the trail because it was “something you can all do together.” The Muhlenberg County Public Library sponsored a summer reading program series of local scavenger hunts for children that included a hunt along the rail trail (*Muhlenberg Leader-News* 2003c). There is also an annual family bicycling event held at the trail.

### **Nature value**

The Muhlenberg County Rail Trail passes from a more “urban” end in Greenville and Powderly through a rural section on its way to Central City. This rural section is primarily reclaimed surface mining lands that are now part of the Peabody Wildlife Management Area with forests, marshes, ponds, and open fields. The mine lands have been abandoned since the early 1980s so the area is an established habitat for birds, fish, beaver, and other animals. A local Boy Scout troop constructed a bird watching platform roughly halfway between Greenville and Central City. The troop also posted a sign that reads “Rails to Trails – Common Birds” and shows pictures to help watchers identify fifty species of birds. Both nature watching and fishing attract users to this portion of the trail. A brochure produced by the local chambers of commerce touts “numerous sightings of rare birds and animals in their natural habitats” as a reason to come use the trail. The pictures in this brochure all are of natural features along the trail (except for one of the cabooses): the rail corridor through scenic rock cuts, fall leaves, summer foliage, and ponds along the trail. The initial Transportation Enhancement funding application (1999)



from the county stated the intent that this trail would provide “a natural habitat and hopefully nurture wildlife and plants.”

### **Economic values**

Kirtley relates in a Kentucky Educational Television (KET) video that before construction, adjacent businesses felt that the trail would not have a positive impact and some even feared a negative impact. But the reality turned out to be quite the opposite. Businesses lining the trail learned that slow moving walkers are more likely to stop and look at things than people speeding past in cars. The car dealership directly on the trail aligns its cars for maximum exposure to trail users. Of the dealer, Kirtley said “He sells more cars to walkers than he does to drive-bys” (Kirtley in KET 2004). Other businesses reported an uptick in business from trail users who drive in from around the region to use the trail. The Greenville end of the trail is across the road from a typical highway strip of stores and restaurants. As a visitor to the trail it was very convenient to have a meal across the road and then walk or ride the trail, though it felt a bit contradictory to be eating at DQ or McDonald’s and then exercising on the trail! A few small enterprises have opened to serve trail traffic including the seasonal “Trailside Icee” located directly on the right of way.

Businesses routinely advertise their proximity to the trail – both as a landmark and as a selling point. One hotel in Central City advertises its proximity to the trail on its website (Best Western: <http://www.bestwesternkentucky.com/central-city-hotels/>). In the section that highlights area activities of interest to tourists the trail is the *only* item. This is a bit misleading though because the county does in fact have many other historic

attractions.<sup>19</sup> Ads in the local newspaper also highlight the proximity of the trail to commercial buildings for sale. One reads “plenty of parking, direct access to industrial park and rails to trails.”



Figure 6.10: Trailside Icee, a business that opened up along the Muhlenberg Rail Trail.

Kirtley would like to see the trail grow as more of a regional tourism amenity, but folks aren’t willing to drive too far to come for a six mile trail. His opinion is that a trail should be at least twelve miles in length to draw overnight visitors. The remainder of the abandoned rail corridor was not railbanked, so the likelihood of extending it is quite

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<sup>19</sup> The most well known is the association with music legends such as the Everly Brothers and Merle Travis. Community pride in its musical history is evident in the many streets renamed for famous musical sons: John Prine Avenue, Everly Brothers Boulevard, and also by the prominent monuments to these musicians. There is a monument on the lawn of City Hall in Central City to the Everly Brothers. Powderly is home to the Thumb Pickers Hall of Fame. Adjacent to the Hall of Fame in Powderly is Paradise Park. This park is part performance space (it has a stage for outdoor music events) and part museum; it is home to several historic buildings that have been moved to the site. These include a typical shotgun style miner’s cottage, the home of Merle Travis, and a c. 1935 two-room school building. The park also features a reconstructed 1920’s coal mining town.

small. A trail like the proposed 36 mile Dawkins Line trail in Magoffin, Breathitt, and Johnson counties (in Eastern Kentucky) is more likely to draw people from hours (and even states) away because it is a weekend excursion instead of a one or two hour excursion.

### **Historic value**

The trail's historic value was acknowledged through recognition of past coal mining activity and its history as a railroad. The county promoted this new, collectively recognized historic value by building "historic railroad themed" additions to the trail, through historic railroad artifacts, and by giving historic preservation attention to adjacent historic buildings. Old railroad employees/enthusiasts spearheaded bringing in a former Paducah and Louisville RY caboose and filling it with railroad memorabilia for a small museum. They also built the platform around the caboose out of old railroad ties and installed other railroad artifacts here including a baggage cart and signal lights. This platform is meant to evoke the feeling of a railroad station platform.

One former railroad employee spoke of the importance of the railroad to the community, "the railroad meant a lot to the county...It employed a lot of people...There were three shifts working around the clock here" (Greenwood, quoted in Carver 2004b). He goes on to say he hopes the caboose placed at the trail will help remind people how important the railroad was to the community while it was active and how important it still is "in the memories of many people there" (Carver 2004b). The peak years of mining were also the peak years of the railroad and after mining the railroads employed the next largest number of people in the county (Camplin 1984).

Trail users surveyed on site gave varying opinions on the value of historic features in relation to the trail. People liked the covered bridge and cabooses, but fewer than half of respondents said that railroad or mining history associated with the corridor factored into their valuation of it. One user remarked that he remembered the mines and the coal hauling trains and another said that it was important to her to keep history in mind, but several others said it made no difference to them.

The covered bridge on the Greenville trailhead is a good illustration of the way historic values are played out in the community, on their own terms. Covered bridges are not an authentic piece of railroad history (indeed, they were built for roads during horse and carriage days), but it has a “historic feel” that resonates with the public. Many trail users I spoke to mentioned it as one of their favorite spots on the trail. While interviewing staff from the Kentucky Heritage Council I brought up this bridge. Surprisingly, they defended the bridge. They didn’t disparage it as an inauthentic, out of context, reconstruction. One of them even tried to justify it as authentic with reference to the snow sheds built over mountain railroads out west, an argument not any more related than covered highway bridges! I expected them to take a more purist historic preservationist attitude, wanting both historic and historic-themed reconstructions to maintain a sense of authenticity. I am not even certain that they saw the irony or why I even brought it up as an odd feature.

How do local residents think about history? What connections do they make to history? The Muhlenberg County Public Library’s Genealogy and Local History Annex provides resources and expertise for people to research their ancestry, especially in relation to county sites and events. The Annex acts like a typical county history museum

or historical society in that it provides information to visitors and puts on a few programs on history topics, but the focus is on genealogical research, offering classes to the public. In the county newspaper, the weekly library news column publishes a lot of information on doing genealogical research. This impression that history means genealogy was illustrated in another newspaper story that began “History is more than just genealogy, dates, and events” (*Muhlenberg Leader News* 2003d). The existence and format of the Annex gives insight into the ways that local residents value and find meaning in the past. Here the entry point to history is through family connections and stories. This seems to be true for a lot of Kentucky. History means genealogy, family cemeteries, living in places that still have the family name, and a strong feeling of connection to places through these family ties. The past is never very distant; it is part of everyday life, but through the lens of family and not through academic or official historic offerings (Rosenzweig 1998). This desire for connection to place through family ties is an important thread in both people’s senses of history and place (Glassberg 2001).

A (fairly) recent history of Muhlenberg County illustrates the pull of family histories (Camplin 1984). Chapters are centered on each town and settlement (extant and lost) in the county; text within these chapters pays attention primarily to who settled these places and who the key characters were through the years. Subsequent chapters focus specifically on individuals then move on to the important companies, schools, and cemeteries in the county, with extended sections on the coal and oil industries. As of 1998 this book was still advertised for sale in the Muhlenberg County newspaper. Indicating the way that local residents engage with history, a newspaper ad touted the “hundreds of family names mentioned” in the book and that it was the only “useful and

comprehensive” book on Muhlenberg County history since 1913 (Rothert 1913). Another county history book entitled *Muhlenberg County, Kentucky: History and Families, 1799-1996* (Turner Publishing Co. 1996) also shows the way that genealogy is a primary connection county residents make to history. Of 304 pages, only the first sixty-five could be called the “history” section of the book; the remainder is entirely genealogies of individual families, in alphabetical order. Even those sixty five pages are not all history; some of them are advertisement “histories” of local businesses and churches. The publisher’s (and authors’) value for genealogy as a path to the past is evident in the front matter of the book. The publisher wrote, “The history of various churches, schools, organizations, businesses and *most importantly*, the histories of hundreds of families, are also now documented in this historic volume” (emphasis added)(Turner Publishing Co. 1996: 3). This value was further reinforced through Judge Executive Rodney Kirtley’s proclamation of October 22-27, 1995, as “Family History Week” in Muhlenberg County. His proclamation reads, in part, “Whereas, Muhlenberg County has long been rich in the values and traditions of family heritage; and whereas, the Muhlenberg County Genealogical Society has been a blessed leader and an integral part in obtaining an account of the families that have made Muhlenberg County the rich and proud county that it has become...”(Turner Publishing Co. 1996:3). We have to be mindful though that people do not approach history only at the town museum or the locally published history book. There are many inputs and influences to an individual’s or a community’s sense of history such as personal memories, schooling, family, popular culture, past residences and travels, political and economic situations, and so on (Glassberg 2001).

Somewhat rare for the state of Kentucky, Muhlenberg County has relatively few sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are only eleven sites, nine of which are in Greenville (National Park Service 2010). When doing a keyword search of Muhlenberg County's newspaper archives (2001-2007), a search for the phrase "historic preservation" yielded no results. This lack of National Register sites might mean that there has been little local leadership on nominations, though the state preservation office (Kentucky Heritage Council) is quite active state-wide in assisting with nominations. It may have something to do with a local sense of history or of what is "historic" but I can only speculate. It is yet to be seen what larger effects (if any) the trail may have on historic preservation or local history pursuits in the county; perhaps there will be a greater focus on historic buildings and artifacts (as in the vacant high school adjacent to the trailhead). My sense is that there are many more influencing factors in this process than any trail (even a very popular and important one) could provide. An exploration of the local community's sense of history supports our understanding of how the historic values of the railroad landscape are expressed and understood among the people of Muhlenberg County. While some other trail projects focus more on buildings (authentically historic or reconstructed replicas), the Muhlenberg trail connects people to history through remembering the stories of people involved in railroading and mining and through a loosely historic looking, but much loved covered bridge and the old caboose. The value is placed not so much on official and authentic historic artifacts as connections to the past.

In sum, values matter in Muhlenberg County's rail trail landscape because they influenced not only the way the trail was developed but how it came to be used and loved

as an important place in the community. To view this landscape through the “values in place” lens gives us a fuller picture of what the trail landscape means to the community. The rail trail has become a central node in the network of social interactions in the community and a significant “memory place” (Glassberg 2001). This is because of the value the place has as a site for connecting with family and friends, and as a place where community events happen. We see the way the railroad corridor moved from being an economically and socially central landscape to being devalued after abandonment. After redevelopment as a trail we see the valued as a community gathering place and a catalyst for progress in the realms of recreation and health and wellness. The Muhlenberg County rail trail is hardly a good example of values based preservation in action, but as a case study it speaks to the power of a method for practice that incorporates community values and input from early on in the planning process. It is difficult to speculate what might have happened there had the county worked to accomplish extensive community buy in. They may not have ever gotten it and the project may never have been completed. This may be a case where “top down” planning was the most effective strategy; in the end the community ended up with something that became valuable to them, but perhaps there were few who envisioned its potential value. The Muhlenberg County example is a telling one for the case of shifting values over time; this site moved from valued, to devalued, to revalued in a totally new way.

### **Oldham County**

The endeavor to examine the intersecting values in the Oldham County Greenway example is a much different one than that of Muhlenberg County, not just because of the trails’ settings, but also because the stage of development. The three mile trail section of



Oldham County Greenways just opened in 2009 and there is not a significant period of years to examine how the community has come to value these places. More of the examination here focuses on the process of determining the need for trails, advocating for their construction, and their role in larger community values. In this case, trails play a key role in the vision that residents have for the future of their communities in the face of rapid population change and development.

Unlike Muhlenberg County and Vento Sanctuary, it is difficult to assess and describe the shifting values for the Oldham County greenway site. The downtown LaGrange portion is only 0.6 mile long, of which only 0.2 mile was new construction (the rest was extant sidewalks), though the non- trail development of the depot is significant too. Only the western-most one tenth of a mile of right of way was former interurban railway corridor. That area was a small grassy boulevard prior to conversion to trail, not a trashy, weedy abandoned railroad corridor. The new three mile segment was not a railroad corridor conversion, it is a new pathway constructed by a new roadway through what was once agricultural land. We can speak in general of how the community values its greenways, the way values shifted for land uses, and how preservation of agricultural uses and vistas is important, but the actual sites of the trails are not like the trail sites in the other two case studies in the sense of the valued/devalued/revalued life cycle. The situation in Oldham County with respect to support for the trail project was also very different from that of Muhlenberg County. Paul Clinton, past president of Greenways for Oldham County, stated that he never heard a word of opposition to the trail project. It wasn't a process of defeating the opposition; it was a process of building support in all of

the appropriate places and working out logistics and funding to get the trail on the ground.

In a rapidly suburbanizing place such as Oldham County, threats to agricultural land don't come in the form of trails. The threats are subdivisions, big box retail, strip malls, and expanded road capacity. The value set associated with the Oldham County Greenways is tied to both the county's history and to its future. Planners envision the trails network as both an amenity to attract residents and serve their needs but also as a device to preserve a landscape and a way of life that made the county attractive in the first place. Much of the language around trails development in the county focuses on "quality of life" elements: transportation options, recreation, natural resources, and historic resources. Brandstetter-Carroll hosted a summit for trail stakeholders to contribute ideas and express their opinions. Part of the firm's job was to incorporate extensive public involvement in the planning process. This included public surveys and this hearing (they called it a summit). Twenty-nine different groups made brief presentations at the meeting including many expected ones like Greenways for Oldham County and Metro Louisville Parks, but many others came as well such as a group representing developers and realtors<sup>20</sup>. The Oldham County Bike, Pedestrian, and Greenway Master Plan, released in 2008 by consulting firm Brandstetter Carroll on behalf of the Oldham County Fiscal Court and Planning and Zoning department,

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<sup>20</sup> Attendees at the stakeholder summit included: Judge-Executive Duane Murner, Oldham County Planning and Zoning, Greenways for Oldham County, Oldham County Vision Council, Kentuckiana Regional Planning and Development Agency (who paid for the master plan), Brandstetter Carroll Inc., URS (a planning, design, and construction management firm who advocated for water quality planning), Metro Louisville Parks, Louisville Bicycle Club, two developers, a realtor, Oldham County Economic Development Authority, Oldham Ahead, Friends of Westport, Brownsboro Conservation Council, Harrods Creek Trail Association, Oldham County History Center, Oldham County Equine Council, Kentucky Trail Riders Association, North Oldham Lions Club, Oldham County YMCA, Yew Dell Gardens, and an engineer from Fuller, Mossbarger, Scott, and May.

identified five primary ways that greenways and trails are valuable to the public: they improve communities (through appearance and access), they encourage healthy lifestyles, they increase property values, they allow alternative transportation, and they improve the environment. I found that stakeholders mention all of these values with the addition of one more: preservation values (both landscape preservation and historic preservation related to structures). These values form a framework for the discussion that follows.

### **Quality of life value**

Stakeholders in Oldham County envision trails and greenways contributing to quality of life through “appearance and access.” By these, they are referring to both the aesthetic qualities a greenway brings but also as a practical transportation option. A quality of life opinion survey performed by Oldham Ahead in 2001 found that 97 percent of those surveyed had either a good, very good, or excellent perception of quality of life in Oldham County (Oldham Ahead 2001, sample size = 400). The top two issues of importance to those surveyed was maintaining the high quality of Oldham County public schools and protecting individual property rights. Number five on the list was “managing growth to ensure a higher quality of life” for county residents. About 70 percent of respondents thought that residential growth was occurring too rapidly and 61 percent perceived that “natural, scenic, cultural and/or historic resources” were “threatened by growth” (Oldham Ahead 2001: 21). Seventy-five percent of respondents favored the use of county tax dollars to buy land for more parks and open space. In the area there seems to be a general acceptance of land use planning as a tool to mitigate the negative effects of urban growth (such as traffic, pollution, or school crowding) but there is also an overarching belief that the rights of property owners must be protected at all costs.

Residents are generally not in favor of restricting property uses even for the common good.

In 1999 county residents invited a team of international planning experts to conduct a cooperative study of Oldham County's issues relating to growth. That study, called the Countryside Exchange, became the organization now called Oldham Ahead, which was formed to implement many of the ideas that came out of the exchange study. The Countryside Exchange planners identified five key issues through public meetings: 1) Managing growth through efficient land use, 2) Sustaining and diversifying the economy, 3) Involving the community, 4) Preserving and enhancing natural and cultural resources, and 5) Expanding recreational opportunities (Oldham County Countryside Exchange 2000). The overarching theme was how to promote growth while still protecting what was most valued in the community. This report is probably the first, and still one of the only, that refers to the growth in the county as not good or bad in and of itself, but "rather, the problem is sprawling development in the form of spreading, low density, totally automobile dependent housing, shopping, and industrial parks" (Oldham County Countryside Exchange 2000, no page numbers). The nature of growth must be addressed in order to maintain the quality of life that residents enjoy.

In 2007, Duane Murner, the county Judge Executive, appointed a task force called the Oldham County Vision Council and directed them to lay out the vision for the county in four years. One point of their vision was "by 2011 Oldham County has a 'managed growth' philosophy that provides adequate and efficient infrastructure and utilities; great schools; open spaces, greenways, trails and parks, and the continued high quality of life we enjoy as residents of the county" (Oldham County Vision Council 2007: 3). Here

they are approaching the findings of the Countryside Exchange report that sprawl and the status quo are not working and that a new approach through “smart growth” will be better, but they don’t go as far as to say that they support “smart growth.”

The TEA-21 grant application in 1998 was prepared by Claire Bennett Associates, the same landscape architecture firm that then prepared the initial greenway master plan in 2003. The summary statement in the application situates the greenway as a project that will “improv[e] the quality of life across the county” in the way that it will link residential centers, amenities, and recreational areas with an alternative form of transportation (Oldham County Fiscal Court 1998: 2). Greenways for Oldham County, the non-profit group formed to support the development of trails in the county, states that their mission is “to encourage the creation of trails and greenway corridors, parks, and preserves in order to enhance and conserve the quality of life for the citizens and wildlife of Oldham County, Kentucky” (Greenways for Oldham County website 2010).

### **Values for healthy lifestyles**

In light of the county’s growth trajectory, county planning and zoning agencies have been active in addressing the current and anticipated future needs of county residents for recreation and green space for all ages. The greenway plans were legitimized by inclusion into long range county plans. The 2008 greenway master-planning process included extensive surveys, focus groups, and community meetings in order to learn what the community wanted in terms of trails and recreation opportunities in Oldham County. Two-thirds of survey respondents expressed a need for paved bike and walking trails (ranked number two in a list of twenty-eight items including playgrounds, soccer fields, golf courses, and natural areas, among others). When asked

how important particular recreation amenities were to households, respondents answered that paved walking and biking trails are the most important (out of the same twenty-eight choices). The greenway plan (2008) placed a strong emphasis on the value of trails to helping encourage a healthy lifestyle; indeed, the third goal of the plan was to “encourage healthy lifestyles” (after linking county amenities and reducing auto dependency) (Oldham County Planning and Zoning 2008: 1).

There are two aspects of “healthy lifestyles” that trails planners refer to when thinking about trails. One is the sense of encouraging physical activity and the other is fostering safe pathways for pedestrians to use, protected from road traffic. A network of greenways serves both of these goals and these health/safety and health/fitness aspects are woven through discussions on both alternative transportation and exercise. Several local residents, interviewed in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, expressed how dangerous it is to bike, walk, or run in Oldham county and how difficult it is to run a route greater than three miles because of the lack of sidewalks and predominance of dangerous roadways (Uhde 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). Some runners even drive to Jefferson County (Louisville) to work out because of trails available there. One runner stated “It's pretty dangerous to run in Oldham County. You're mostly running on roads because there's no place else to go” (Patrick Welborn, quoted by Uhde 2008c). Another Oldham runner said “There is not a place where you can do six miles in the entire county” (Rita Willis, quoted by Uhde 2008b). A 2007 survey completed by the consultants who wrote the 2008 Greenways Master Plan found that 80 percent of residents surveyed lived in neighborhoods that lacked sidewalks and felt unsafe walking or biking alongside traffic (Oldham County Planning and Zoning 2008: 2).

The brochure produced by Greenways for Oldham County (GOC) refers to health and fitness benefits almost as an aside, so obvious that they barely merit a mention. The text quickly moves on to some of the less expected benefits such as social, tourism, and economic aspects of trail development (Greenways for Oldham County no date). The recreational potential is a major focus for the loop trails under development in Wendell Moore Park, especially to visitors to the nearby senior center as the trails are level and accessible with plentiful benches. GOC focuses more attention to the recreational potential of these trails on their website. Also, in reference to the new Commerce Parkway trail segments, Greenways for Oldham County states, “[t]he planned path would provide a safe place for pedestrians and bicyclists without the use of highways and present an exercise option to residents” (GOC website 2009).

There is much less focus on the dire health situation of Oldham County or Kentucky in general in discussions about the greenways. Perhaps this is because the county was rated the healthiest county in the state by the Kentucky Institute of Medicine in *The Health of Kentucky: A County Assessment* (2007). This report compared such things as demographic data, health access, health outcomes, and behavioral factors and though Oldham ranked higher than any other Kentucky county, they still lag behind the national average on some other measures of health outcomes such as cancer rates.

### **Environmental values**

Communication about Oldham County Greenways related to environmental values is both similar to and different from the other case studies. In one sense it is very different because the greenways themselves are envisioned as a way to conserve wildlife habitats and natural landscapes but actually, with what has been built and what is

proposed next, the trail is merely going in as a sidewalk in an already developed/developing place, not as a hedge against development nor does it provide access to natural areas such as Muhlenberg or Vento. Future trails may be more nature-focused or they may provide some habitat, but not so far. It is more of an idea of the environment – that trails and greenways are things related to nature and therefore opposite of rampant suburban growth. Here, greenspace serves as the signifier of rural landscapes but in reality, the new trails (especially along Commerce Parkway) are just small ways to mitigate some effects of sprawl, not create a landscape of “nature”. They are similar to the other case studies in that the trails are envisioned as a broadly accessible place for people to enjoy outdoor recreation.

There is little mention of environmental values by various stakeholders; their emphasis is much stronger on the safety and recreation benefits of dedicated bike/pedestrian pathways. An exception is the mission statement of Greenways for Oldham County; it is very focused on both people and nature:

“The organization serves as an Oldham County, Kentucky community resource for the benefit of the county's residents and visitors to promote the creation of greenways that will preserve and enhance the natural environment and outdoor recreational opportunities, for the quality of life for citizens and wildlife.”

Elsewhere on GOC’s website they highlight some general environmental benefits of trails and greenways, but not necessarily specific to the actual greenways built or planned for in Oldham County.

Many stakeholders expressed how beautiful the landscape is in the county (horse farms, the river, agricultural areas, rolling hills, lakes) and how much of a draw that landscape is to new residents, yet they also mentioned how hard it is to enjoy that



landscape unless your home happens to adjoin it. People mention a lack of trails, sidewalks, public access greenspace, and parks or nature areas. Other residents speak of the tension between development and the environment. Some of the impacts have been habitat destruction, farmland reduction, and pollution from lack of sewer capacity. Trails and greenways in general are viewed as a way to mitigate the effects of development.

### **Property values**

More so than at either of the other two case studies, property values are a central value associated with trail development in Oldham County. The area's development and economic growth is driven largely by residential home building and increases in home value. This is an important issue for both homeowners and the county government since the county is such a bedroom community and so much of the tax revenue comes from residential property taxes. Greenways for Oldham County mentions it as a benefit to the community as does the 2008 Greenways Master Plan, which states that trails can improve the values of nearby properties by 20 percent or more citing a study by the Trust for Public Land (Crompton 2007). Realtors and developers mentioned the way that proximity to and presence of trails and greenways increases property values.

One realtor at the parks and greenways summit highlighted a new subdivision with planned internal trails (and mentioned that others are doing this as well), but it failed to connect to an external, county wide network. This is the same old problem others mentioned of being able to walk a mile or two, but not get anywhere and not be able to safely run six miles. She highlighted the way that trails increase property values nationally and also referred to studies done by the National Association of Home Builders that found trails, sidewalks, and parks were ranked as the second, third, and

fourth most important amenities that homebuyers wanted. This realtor mentioned that households who move to Kentucky from other places around the country expect there to be trails and parks<sup>21</sup>. Trails are a piece of the competition for attracting new residents. One of the new subdivisions near the new Commerce Parkway trail has plans for a connection to the trail; one of the home builders marketing homes there mentions that the neighborhood is “adjoining LaGrange greenway system” (O’Rourke and Associates 2009). This neighborhood features neo-traditional home designs, each with a prominent front porch and sidewalks out front, yet still features a street system of culs de sac and only one entrance from the feeder road. So there are some concessions to new urbanism and smart growth but still quite a bit of the status quo as well.

Not all residents of already-built neighborhoods agree that trails will benefit them with higher property values or in other ways. One of the future trail segments proposed by county planners was a segment along Harrod’s Creek in northern Oldham County. This segment would rely on easements through private property. Residents there expressed concern about their safety and property values. Though extensive research<sup>22</sup> disproves these fears, the trails planners decided to not pursue developing that trail segment and instead focus on segments for which there is greater public support (Uhde 2007b).

Greenways for Oldham County also refers to studies done by others to make the point that property values tend to increase in proximity to trails and parks (specifically a

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<sup>21</sup> This was my family’s experience as well in moving from Minneapolis, Minnesota to Lexington, Kentucky in 1999. We were disoriented by the lack of paved, urban pedestrian trails we had come to expect.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example: Greer 2000, Karadeniz 2008, Seattle Engineering Department 1987, and numerous reports and fact sheets available from the Rails to Trails Conservancy at [RTC.org](http://RTC.org).

study done by the National Park Service 1995). They make the point that the whole community benefits from increased property values, not just those property owners, as tax revenues then increase.<sup>23</sup> It does not appear that any study has been done to assess the impact of proximity to parks and trails to property values in Oldham County; this is logical seeing how the trails are all quite new and there are so many other studies out there. The concern with property values in Oldham County in relation to trails is two-fold: some residents and developers believe that their property values will be boosted by proximity to trail networks; others perceive that trails running near their properties will lower their property values. The vast abundance of research supports the former view and not the latter, but it makes the opinions of those property owners no less important.

### **Transportation value**

Much of the conversation about Oldham County Greenways uses the words “connection,” “connectivity,” or “connecting.” The goals are to connect the individual communities and neighborhoods within the county to one another, to connect people to places like parks, schools, and libraries, and to connect Oldham County trail networks to the trails in Jefferson County (Louisville metro). The network of trails is designed not just for recreation but for transportation; it allows people to travel to places they need to go and would have otherwise needed to drive to such as school, work, and shopping destinations. Planned future trail segments will make these trips easier than what is currently in place.

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<sup>23</sup> It does not appear that any study has been done to assess the impact of proximity to parks and trails to property values in Oldham County; this is logical seeing how the trails are all quite new and there are so many other studies out there.

Greenways for Oldham County uses the “connecting” idea as its slogan: “connecting our communities.” They repeatedly focus on the connections the trail network will create and the importance of providing alternative transportation choices in their rapidly developing county. On a page justifying the Commerce Parkway trail segment, GOC highlights the access the trail will provide to housing developments, businesses and public amenities such as the new public library, the health department, and a planned elementary school. As the county redesigns and upgrades the capacity of its roads, it is designing in bike and pedestrian facilities and planning to complete them at the same time as road construction. Nationally, there is a movement for “Complete Streets” that embraces this concept: roadways should not just accommodate car and truck traffic, but also should provide facilities for pedestrians, bikes, and transit (National Complete Streets Coalition 2010). Commerce Parkway sits in the middle of three major upcoming road upgrades: Kentucky Highway 53 on the eastern end, Kentucky Highway 393 on the western end, and a proposed future overpass that will extend south from Allen Lane over Interstate 71 (see Figure 5.3 on page 147). All of these projects are being designed with pedestrian facilities. In terms of multi-modal connections, Commerce Parkway is already home to two Park and TARC (park and ride for Transit Authority of River City system) facilities: one at the east end and one at the west end. This allows commuters to drive, bike, or walk to catch their buses.

Two of the goals of the 2008 Greenways Master Plan relate directly to transportation. The first is “link parks, schools, neighborhoods, and commercial areas across the county” and the second is “reduce dependency on the automobile” (Oldham County Planning and Zoning 2008: 1). The Oldham County Master Plan (adopted 2002

and readopted in 2007) also includes bicycle and pedestrian facilities as central transportation needs. One of the goals of this plan under a section called the “Transportation Element” was to “coordinate the Major Thoroughfare Plan with other modes of travel, including bus transit, rail, airport, pedestrian and bicycle, to comprehensively address mobility issues and needs within Oldham County” (Oldham County Planning and Zoning 2002/2007, quoted in Oldham County Planning and Zoning 2008: 125).

Trails and recreation planners in Oldham County recognize that as the population grows there will be increased needs for alternative transportation and pedestrian connectivity. The greenways are a vital component of this plan and reflect the community’s need and value for trails as expressed in the 2008 Greenways Plan. Many subdivisions feature stand-alone trails but of key importance are connections that provide destinations and the option to travel many miles on safe, off road routes.

**Preservation values: historic and landscape**

In 2003 planners for the Oldham County Day celebration choose as their theme “Green Paths to Preservation,” based on the greenway project. Paul Clinton, then president of Greenways for Oldham County, served as the grand marshal of the parade that year, so they created the theme based on the greenway project. “Green Paths to Preservation” refers not just to preservation of green space and rural landscapes but also to preservation of historic places and features. This event is indicative of the way that preservation values of both varieties weave throughout the Oldham County Greenway story. Indeed, in Oldham County it’s sometimes difficult to talk about historic preservation without talking about the rural landscape – both are threatened by the fast

rate of growth and change. Here, the rural landscape includes agricultural lands and horse farms in particular but also natural and wooded areas. An editorial written by a county resident in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* summarizes a common feeling in Oldham County. She asks what people want,

A second overpopulated, ugly, gated community ... or a pristine, beautiful, blackfenced horse farm with beautiful thoroughbreds, yearlings and colts romping around? ... Oldham County and this commonwealth need to seriously examine ... whether the Commonwealth of Kentucky wants to be known for the preservation of its Kentucky Bluegrass horse farm heritage or for ugly subdivisions that are completely changing its complexion (Norris 2003).

County residents have responded to decreased farm acreage, increased population, expanded road capacity, and sprouting strip malls and commercial areas in ways that protect the landscape and historic structures that support the sense of place in LaGrange and Oldham County – the landscape that drew them to the area in the first place. Bill Macintire, the historic site survey coordinator with the Kentucky Heritage Council, estimated that around 400 historic sites and structures had been surveyed in Oldham County, but that “of course, it’s growing so fast a lot of it’s threatened” (quoted in Elson 2004)<sup>24</sup>. Forty-five sites in the county are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Greenways for Oldham County enjoys strong support from Oldham Ahead, an organization whose mission is to “preserv[e] the rural nature and quality of life in

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<sup>24</sup> The state survey of historic properties is distinct from properties nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. This survey is a written and photographic record of historic buildings and sites throughout Kentucky. The survey forms can be completed by professionals and amateurs alike (I completed a few as part of historic preservation coursework). Officially called the Kentucky Historic Resources Inventory, more than 80,000 sites have been recorded. More information can be found here: <http://heritage.ky.gov/natreg/histbldgsurv/>.

Oldham County, Kentucky” and whose motto is “preserving a rural legacy for the 22nd century”(Oldham Ahead website 2009). The group

supports land-use planning, economic development and advocacy efforts that enhance the county's natural and cultural resources while sustaining and diversifying the county's economy. Oldham Ahead is dedicated to perpetuating the agricultural and equine industries, preserving the environment and expanding recreational opportunities throughout the county (Oldham Ahead website 2009).

Greenways are a way to address many of the things they value and support; it was a natural partnership. Other county preservation/smart growth advocacy groups also support trails and greenway development. One who spoke in support of trails at the Greenway Summit was the Friends of Westport, a “volunteer community preservation and development group.” Another was the Brownsboro Conservation Council, whose mission is to “ensure a stronger voice for those effected [sic] by any future growth and development of Brownsboro” and whose motto is “planning the future by protecting the past.” Their website gives some indication of the values espoused by this group. There is a poll on the home page that reads “Your Choice. Your Future. Brownsboro as...” and allows the reader to click only one of seven choices: 1)Nature Preserves, 2)Rural and Agricultural, 3) Mini-farms and Estates, 4) Single-family Homes and Gated Communities, 5) Condominiums and Apartments, 6) Malls and Shopping Centers, or 7) Industrial Parks. Poll results so far show that 35 percent of respondents chose “rural and agricultural” and 31 percent chose “Mini-farms and Estates” (as of 6/24/10, BCC website). It is not surprising that malls and shopping centers received only one vote.

County planning agencies are working to address the relentless population growth and the related stress on infrastructure (Ellis 2005, Oldham County Planning and Zoning 2005 Annual Development Report – referenced in Oldham County Planning and Zoning

2008). One major problem in the county has been sewer capacity. Some sewer facilities were at or near maximum capacity, and one was even cited for being beyond capacity and causing pollution. Meanwhile permits continued to be issued for new developments. Recently, the county began construction on two new sewer plants, but many large one to two acre lot rural subdivisions continue to build with septic systems instead of hooking in to the sewer system (Uhde 2009c). Indeed, one town in the county, PeeWee Valley, has no sewer service and all development is mandated at one acre or more for residential lots to accommodate septic systems (Chaplin 2004). Some subdivisions advertise “sewer hookups” as a marketing piece since this has been such a contentious issue. Open space preservation in new subdivisions is another regulation the county is working on. Sewer capacity is related to landscape preservation because as sewer capacity goes, development follows. In places that are not hooked up to a centralized sewage system, lots must be large enough to handle individual septic systems. Places that have inadequate sewer systems either delay development until they can be expanded, can lead to pollution if development outpaces additional capacity, or can actually stifle development if expansion is significantly delayed. Suburban growth and landscape preservation interests are both keenly attuned to the sewer capacity developments in suburban Louisville.

LaGrange embraces the railroad’s centrality in its town identity. Remember that the CSXT railroad line runs directly down the middle of Main Street, right through the core of the community. More than twenty freight trains pass through each day attracting tourists and rail fans alike (Uhde 2009a). The town motto is “We’re on track” and this motto appears all over town: on banners hung from light poles, on welcome signs at the



edge of town, on city documents, and on the water tower. Train enthusiasts can buy a variety of souvenirs at several of the downtown shops that feature trains or tracks or read “LaGrange: A Train Runs Through It”. The Main Street program, “Discover Downtown LaGrange,” uses a stylized graphic of the downtown and the train tracks as its logo. Hayden writes that identity, history, and the built environment are all “intertwined” (1995: 15). LaGrange city councilwoman and life-long resident Lucy Ricketts, speaking about issues relating to LaGrange’s active freight line, said “The trains are a part of me. Someone needed to step up and be active. I felt this was my place. All council members feel as I do” (McKinney 2004).



Figure 6.11: Oldham County logos that display references to the centrality of the railroad.



Figure 6.12: Welcome sign to LaGrange.

Also located downtown, adjacent to the courthouse square and the railroad tracks on Main Street, is the museum and offices of the Oldham County Historical Society. Their logo too indicates the importance of the railroad in the story of the county's history. It is a simple house shape crossed by a river, railroad tracks, and highway stripes to recount the area's transportation history.

Historic preservation and highlighting historic sites were some of the greenway project's primary values as explained in the 1998 TEA-21 funding application. The trail would serve as an attraction for "tourists interested in experiencing the history and beauty of Oldham County" and would serve local residents through the "protection of significant historical sites and structures, new links between neighborhoods and commercial areas, increased property values and protection and enhancement of the natural environment" (Oldham County Fiscal Court 1998:4). The depot is repeatedly referred to as the Historic

Depot (always capitalized). Historic elements are pieces of the landscape that increase the value of the whole package – history as commodity (Lewis 1975, Lowenthal 1996).

Lewis argues that many times we “preserve things because they pay: preservation will attract tourists, affluent residents, and ultimately produce higher real estate values and thus higher tax yields” (Lewis 1975: 16). This argument speaks to decision makers (lawmakers, developers, banks) who are used to dollar value rationales, but this perspective can be problematic because it then forces preservationists to put a dollar value on something that is culturally or intangibly valuable.

Heritage tourism and downtown revitalization are important for LaGrange. Preserving and reusing the historic railroad depot is but one piece of LaGrange’s historic preservation program in its downtown area that enhances the town’s attraction as an historic destination. There is a well-established record of research on “areas that more readily lend themselves to quantification: rehabilitation, housing, heritage tourism, and downtown revitalization” (Listokin et al 1998: 423, see also Listokin et al 2010, Rypkema 2005). Participation in the Main Street Program and the synergy of having so many historic homes, businesses, and civic buildings in one historic streetscape are also keys to LaGrange’s success, in addition to the surrounding historic rural landscape. There is little disagreement that historic preservation makes a quantifiable economic contribution to a community, but there is much discussion on how best to quantify those contributions (Mason 2005).

The landscape architects who authored the first trail master plan (1998) tied their proposed design elements to historic elements in the cultural and natural landscapes that surround the trail’s route. The design “commemorate[s] the rich history of the Kentucky

landscape by selecting materials and forms indigenous to the area” (CBA 2003: 5). Trail seating and signage are to be constructed of large limestone blocks reminiscent of the “large, oversized, limestone boulders used as foundation elements for several significant historic buildings in LaGrange” (CBA 2003: 5). The other design element borrowed from the surrounding landscape was the iconic four-board horse fence. This element was used throughout the trail design in fencing, bollards, the trail logo, and signage. Some of these elements were adopted into the final design (the limestone benches and bollards) but others were not (the logo). Joann Green, landscape architect with the firm hired to produce the greenway’s master plan, expressed the value of the trail as a site to “celebrate the heritage of the original interurban route” (McKinney 5/2003).

The role of the Oldham County Historical Society (OCHS) in the greenway development is not direct. But the historical society’s values and their community-based programming indirectly offer strong support for the trail and the preservation of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad depot. In the TEA-21 funding application the authors state that Phase One of the greenway project meets “the goals of the County’s most recent comprehensive plan and the objectives of the Oldham County Historical Society” (Oldham County Fiscal Court 1998:4). The current director of the OCHS, Nancy Theiss, is intent on focusing on the meanings of places through the programming, exhibits, and activities at the museum and historical society. Recent examples include local archeological digs where adults and children were invited to participate, a community art project called “paint the pickets” (of the history center’s fence) with a theme of “what does history mean to me?”, and Saturday living history events for children. The historical society office and museum is located across the street from the county courthouse on

Main Street in LaGrange (down which the many daily freight trains travel). Theiss instituted regular sense of place hands-on workshops for children that focused on “local cultural and natural history” (OCHS 2006: 3). The workshops covered topics such as pioneer cooking, archeology, local Native American cultures, and diaries as archives. The history center also hosted events for the larger community on the same “sense of place” theme, beginning in 2003. A 2004 special exhibit entitled “Mapping my Sense of Place” featured the interactive “Riverlab”: a sand and water exhibit where visitors can see how streams and rivers flow and function. Another part of this exhibit included an opportunity for visitors to view a variety of local maps and aerial photos and a chance to “make their own maps of their community and locate the special features of Oldham County that make it unique” (OCHS 2004: 4). A representative from the OCHS spoke at the greenways summit on the important corridors that trails and greenways will help to preserve, protect, and highlight to the public. Some of these places included truck farms and vineyards along highway 146, the railroad and interurban corridor in LaGrange leading to other towns, the Ohio River valley in general, early settlements in Brownsboro and along Hwy 42, and PeeWee Valley.

It seems that the LaGrange depot was not just a community rallying point or a symbol of the community’s value of historic landscapes, but a tool to acquire trail funding. Here historic preservation was an acceptable activity to the community, but not necessarily the only important one. It was a step toward attaining a trail, and the trail was valued by an even broader audience than historic preservation may have had. This is an unexpected type of value placed on historic landscapes and landscape features, different from more common ways of valuing such as memorializing important events, recalling

pleasant childhood days, exemplifying an architectural style or kind of craftsmanship, or as a teaching tool. Here, preservation of an historic landscape feature could be interpreted to be a tool used in a complex process of procuring grant money. I read this as a strategic use of the historic landscape as a commodity to sell a project (trails) to the public or, more likely, the state to get funding. Though this speculation was not directly substantiated through interviews with locals, it was supported by comments from Transportation Center staff members (both former staff now – one of whom referred to the LaGrange depot as “that stupid depot”), and by examining the Transportation Enhancement funding application for the project. I think Greenways for Oldham County used a value for historic structures to get the trail project funded and rolling, but GOC was not really in the historic buildings business, they were in the trails business. The depot is a great trailhead and everyone agrees its preservation is a wonderful asset to the historic core of LaGrange, but it was not the ultimate goal of the greenways movement in Oldham County.

Values matter in examining Oldham County’s greenway landscape because the values tied up in the trail development tell us much about the communities these trails connect. The proposal, design, and construction process tell how a community has responded to development pressures and changing population. An examination of either the development story or the greenway story apart from the other is an incomplete picture of the whole. This counterpoint case study shows how different communities’ experiences with and values for rail trails can be. Oldham and Muhlenberg counties share some things in common like a value for the recreation and health aspects of their trails,

but their approaches to historic values and their other core values are quite different, reflecting their very different settings.

The Oldham County example gives insight into the ways that values based preservation (both historic and landscape preservation) is practiced in the realm of transportation projects. The engineering consulting firm who wrote the greenway master plan employed some commonly used techniques in order to find out what the community's stakeholders valued about their community and what their vision was for the place. These techniques included surveys, listening sessions (public meetings), and a "stakeholders' summit." Even though trails were, for the most part, not opposed by the public or by those in public office, the planners made concerted a effort to listen to the stakeholders and respond to their concerns and wishes in the plans.

Support for trails and parks in Oldham County is a signifier for the desire to both shift to keep up with the changes in the county and also to retain what in the first place attracted the people and growth that brought those changes. Trails are an amenity to attract and retain young families and homebuyers; they are a marketable amenity for new businesses that choose to locate operations there. The Greenways for Oldham County envisions trails at the center of what the county's people value: a healthy, safe lifestyle with lots of amenities including outdoor recreation, alternative transportation, natural resources, and historic landscapes.

### **Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary**

#### **Values shifting over time**

The Vento Sanctuary, perhaps more so than the other two case studies, shows the full array of values that can be represented in one small rail trail site. In this example, we

see not only that there are many intersecting values held by the various stakeholder groups, but that these values are sometimes contradictory and must be skillfully negotiated. Vento is an example of how grassroots planning for historic preservation and trails projects can enrich the final result through neighborhood relationships to the site and the process. At the Vento Sanctuary, values matter because they informed the planning committee and project funders of what was important to the community, they helped the community to come together to rally for the preservation and restoration of this site through a difficult, long, and expensive process, and they matter because this site is so significant to so many different stakeholders for so many different reasons (none more important than the next).

Users, regional planning agencies, city leaders, and other stakeholders recognize the many different ways this place is valuable in the community. A Metropolitan Council memo (2008) cites the cost of cleanup as “minimal when compared with the recreational, economic, and social benefits that the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary will provide to the region.” The vision document completed early in the planning refers to the area as being “rich with ecological, recreational, and social value” (Pitz 2001 [no page numbers]).

Before European exploration and settlement, the site was integral to both the daily life of local Native American populations but also to their spiritual foundations. Dakota people consider Wakan-Tipi, a natural cave within the river bluffs, to be a site of origin for their people. This cave was also used for healing and other ceremonial purposes (Ketz 2007). As a result, this site was, and continues to be, one of special spiritual and cultural value to local Native American groups. The larger flood plain area at the confluence of Phalen Creek, Trout Brook, and the Mississippi river was near three Native American



settlements. Kaposia, or Little Crow's village, was about three miles downstream. This village was home for Dakota people during the summer months and existed from around 1750 to 1837 when the Dakota were forced by a treaty agreement to move the village to the west bank of the river (Miller 1986). On top of the bluffs overlooking the Vento site were a series of burial mounds belonging to the Hopewell Culture (circa 2000 years ago). Only six of the sixteen original mounds remain, as part of Indian Mounds Park.

After Euro-American settlement, the nature sanctuary site was valued for its convenience and connections for transportation; first for the river and later the railroads – connecting up and down the river, to downtown St. Paul, and up the Phalen Creek corridor to points north. The railroads substantially altered the site – adding fill to expand the yards, cutting away the bluffs to gain more area, building the land higher. This was a very valuable site for industrial railroad activity for decades. It was not valued for its ecological or cultural significance, as evidenced by the level of alteration and degree of pollution there.

The site became unvalued, ignored, and full of garbage, after the railroad abandoned operations. This park and trail project received very little opposition because of its condition before conversion to parkland; any investment was clearly an improvement and not many people complained. Less than ten years ago the Phalen Creek Partnership group began thinking about the site's potential. A new vision of value and meaning grew out of ideas for reclaiming the site as a connection to the river, as a connection between neighborhoods to downtown, and as a connection between existing key trail segments. Newer sensitivities to the need for understanding the region's natural history and ecology also prompted some of this work.

When asked her thoughts on what values intersect at the Vento site, steering committee chairperson Carol Carey listed them as geology, the environment, the Native American sacred site, European exploration and settlement, the brewery industry and the railroads, the contemporary story of connections between people and places, community involvement, and trails. She summarized these as “the river, railroads, and beer!” (Carey 2009). Her assessment well represents the values for the site that other stakeholders expressed, though not all listed them as extensively as she did.

### **Values for community connections**

In this section I address the two-fold meaning of “community connections.” The first of these is physical connections within the community in the form of trail networks linking neighborhoods and destinations that formerly were isolated from one another for pedestrians or bicyclists. The second sense is connections between people in the region through participation in the planning process and continued involvement at the site.

The process of negotiation illustrates the important value/meaning for community connections through the site. From the very start public participation and investment in the process has been a fundamental element to Vento’s planning and development (DuPaul 2009, Carey 2009, Ketz 2009, Clark 2009, Metropolitan Council 2008). Community involvement was a hallmark of the project and the planners saw their work as not just a way to create a nice park, but as “a springboard for broader neighborhood improvement and urban revitalization” (Pitz 2001 [no page numbers]). Sarah Clark, one of Lower Phalen Creek Project’s staff members, summarized the process this way

we developed a vision for the watershed that defines our common aspirations....High engagement from the community helps ensure that the project goals and objectives will reflect what people really want – and the more people

want the project, the more they will pursue it and maintain their passion through the often long and challenging process of implementation(Clark and Middleton 2008).

Weiming Lu, president of the Lowertown Redevelopment Corp., one of the twenty-five groups involved in the process, said the project and its success are unusual. "This is not a government or a developer's idea. It's a lot of dedicated people, willing to do what is necessary, getting behind this and making it happen," he said. (Karlson 2004)

Don Ganje, St. Paul Park and Recreation staff member recalled the process as memorable because of the degree of public participation.

It's really been an interesting project mainly from that community standpoint because frankly, I mean we do an awful lot of community outreach and involvement but this was one where they came to us basically, and dragged us into the thing. And you know it was frankly really a pretty horrible piece of property! (Ganje 2009)

He went on to explain how they are unique among community supporters of parks in St. Paul. Other parks also have strong community support, but this group has had many of the same people involved since the very beginning and has been steadily working all along. And, unlike other efforts, the steering committee has continued to "steer" the project even after the City of St. Paul bought and took responsibility for the property. The committee leadership expressed a desire to keep the effort on track, driving towards the next step instead of letting it get lost amongst a huge inventory of City projects.

The development of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary fit in with St. Paul's vision and goals for reconnection to the Mississippi (as outlined in *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework*, St. Paul Riverfront Corporation 1997). In an introductory letter, St. Paul's then mayor, Norm Coleman, stated,

It [the development framework] is premised on the concept of integrating rather than segregating, the city's social, environmental, and economic assets. And, it calls for reconnecting the river, the downtown, and the neighborhoods as a vibrant whole (page ii).

One principle laid out in this vision document was increased investment in the “public realm”: streets and parklands. Improving access to the Mississippi River was an important part of this principle. Two other principles addressed the need to improve connections (physical and visual) and to increase options in the city's transportation network. This referred primarily to pedestrian connections but also to street networks, parking, and transit.

Indeed, the idea of “connection” is more than a “feel good” notion about “bike trails for the sake of bike trails” (Carey 2009). Connections here meant the very real promise of economic redevelopment and quality of life improvements for the residents and businesses of Lowertown and other neighborhoods adjacent to the Sanctuary who would benefit from new bicycle and pedestrian routes as amenities, as transportation, and as community space (Monks 2006).

### **Nature values**

One of the primary values found at the Vento site is the value of nature in the broadest sense. I was interested to learn if people from the neighborhood think of the place as a natural area or an industrial place. Carey said that they think of it as “a natural place, but an urban one.” A chance to see plants growing, streams flowing, birds, and a cave (however altered), is especially valuable in an urban setting. The St. Paul newspaper described the place as an “urban wilderness” (Yuen 2007), “an inner-city wilderness” (Brothers 2007), and an “urban oasis” (Ferraro 2005). There are several subsets to this value of nature. Restoration of the site's ecology is important. Visitors are able to learn

about, see, and even help to accomplish the restoration of native ecosystems. The site is divided into six different ecosystems to show the variety of native ecosystems present in the area (though in reality, these biomes would not all be present in one small site such as this)<sup>25</sup>. Karin DuPaul, president of Friends of Swede Hollow and active on the steering committee, related that neighborhood residents value the site for the fact that “you know to start with it’s no longer a, um, a dump. (laughing) And um, now you can walk down there and you know, there’s a lot of birds, especially people who like, you know, natural settings, I think people are seeing it as a real asset” (DuPaul 2009).

At an open house event in October 2009 sponsored by the project steering committee, they made an effort to illustrate the regional and international migration connections made through the site. Volunteers displayed maps of the paths of migratory birds along the Mississippi River Flyway (which connects Canada to South America) and served coffee from Costa Rica, the winter destination of some bird species that fly through the Vento site on their way south. The Audubon Society has recognized the site as an Important Bird Area (one of 35 in the state), a place “recognized for [its] outstanding value to bird conservation” (sign, on site). Vento is part of the larger Twin Cities Mississippi River Important Bird Area.

Underlining the public value for nature at this site was early involvement and monetary support from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Because the Vento steering committee was able to secure a conservation easement over the site, this opened up funding through the DNR (Ganje 2009). Throughout Minnesota, the DNR has

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<sup>25</sup> These biomes include: floodplain forest, dry prairie, oak savanna, oak woodland, bluff prairie, and spring-fed streams and wetlands.

long been active in trail building and maintenance; they administrate the state trails system which includes many rail trails, some of which are over one hundred miles in length.

### **Education Value**

Education has been an important subset of both the environmental and historical values of the site. The Community Design Center's Youth Conservation Corps was created in response to the need for restoration work. These young interns work in clean up, restoration, leading tours, and peer education. The plans for the interpretive center also build from this value for education. The Science Museum of Minnesota and the National Park Service are involved in this planning process (among others). The City of St. Paul acquired the 36,000 square foot abandoned industrial building, and 1.85 acres of property on which it stands, in 2008. Early visions for this building see its future as an "ecomuseum", a place where the site's geologic, cultural, industrial, and natural history can be interpreted to the public. This building will also include facilities to enable the site to be a field trip destination for the region's school children; it will include restrooms and eating and meeting spaces. For the other three quarters of the space, planners envision multiple potential uses including a pre-school, offices, café, bike shop, non-profit group meeting space, and exhibit space (Lower Phalen Creek Project 2009). Goals for interpretation at the site all focus on history, but in four different areas: geologic history, ecological history, human history, and park history. The development of the interpretive center would move the site to a new level as a regional center for natural and cultural history. Currently, the steering committee sees the interpretive signage at the site playing an educational role in the stead of organized programming and exhibits. This signage will

continue to be an important educational piece at the site, but will be enhanced by an interpretive center.

Early on in the Community Vision plan one of the stated goals of the Lower Phalen Creek Project was to “Build long-term environmental stewardship programs with local youth” (Pitz 2001 [no page numbers]). The process of reclaiming the landscape from neglect and garbage and restoring it to a healthy, native ecosystem is the centerpiece of the environmental education value. The need for environmental education sites was great in St. Paul; at the time of the site’s purchase “school children [were] bussed to suburbs and beyond to experience outdoor environmental programs. With its remarkable natural features close by, the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary at Lower Phalen Creek can fill the need for understanding nature’s important functions right in the center of St. Paul” (Pitz 2001 [no page numbers]). City Council President Kathy Lantry calls the sanctuary “a teaching park for urban dwellers” (Yuen 2005). Some of the environmental and historical educational topics at the site include “interpretation of bird migration, bluff geology, cave formation (Carver’s Cave, Montana Bill’s Cave), natural springs, watershed function, drainage to the river, the history of the Mississippi River floodplain, history of Phalen Creek, stone-lined canal on Fourth Street, and railroad bridges, including the historic East Seventh Street stone arch bridge” in addition to Native American histories associated with the site(City of St. Paul 2010).



Figure 6.13: A trail sign shows the way to various trails, parks, and other amenities from the Vento Sanctuary hub.

### **Recreation value**

Recreation, and its subsets: commuting, exercise, and fun family outdoor activity, are all valued here. The idea of trail connections resonated with people and was something the public rallied around when the project was in the planning stages (Carey 2009). This area was a “missing link” between great trails north and east of downtown St. Paul and the downtown area and the Mississippi River. A desire to connect these places was one of the primary drivers that spurred the development process (Karlson 2002). The site sees high trail traffic counts primarily as a connection point between downtown and these trails, but also as a recreational destination in and of itself. The site is not like many parks in the metro area with playgrounds, picnic areas, or community buildings. It was developed to be a nature sanctuary and trails are the primary recreational feature. Nearby to the sanctuary are several new office developments including county and state



offices like the Pollution Control Agency and the Ramsey County office building. The trail connections through Vento make it possible for these and other downtown workers to commute to work via bike or to take a midday run or ride on nearby trails.

Redevelopment of Lowertown in St. Paul as a residential neighborhood through converted and newly constructed lofts has also been important. As so many new people (and businesses) call Lowertown home, it is very important that they have access to recreational activities and are not neighbors to unpleasant industrial activities (as would have been the case had the asphalt plant located there) (Lee 2008, quoting Weiming Lu).

Minnesota is a place with strong and longstanding values for trails and outdoor recreation ranging from quiet hiking and bird watching, to fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, and all-terrain vehicles. There are many conflicts (on use, on principle, and on funding) between motorized recreation advocates and non-motorized recreation advocates, but this is not an issue in urban areas as those uses are not permitted in cities.

### **Historic values**

Clark and Carey both described some tension between interest groups associated with nature value and historic value but also much compromise and consensus as they determine what would be destroyed, what would be saved, and what would be featured or not on the site. There is a constant amicable tension between the competing and overlapping values at the site: history, environment, and community. The steering committee always has to negotiate the appropriate balance (Clark 2009).

The steering committee works to highlight the importance of both nature and history for the place and how they are intertwined. The combination of nature and history is present on much of the signage and publicity for the site. They also had to work to

compromise between the two in deciding how to develop the site. One example: the large concrete walkway slabs that remained from the days when the site was used for rail car maintenance. They are 800 feet long and six feet wide, in ten parallel rows thirteen feet apart at the center of the site (Pitz 2001). The steering committee struggled to decide what to do with them. Some wanted to preserve them intact to remember the industrial history there. Others wanted to remove them completely. One of the key goals of the project was to restore the native ecosystem which was hard to do if parts of the site were covered in concrete. Besides, the argument went, while we want to remember the railroads, we have to also remember that it was the railroads that destroyed much of the natural ecosystem! The compromise was to leave one slab in place at its full length plus a few portions of the other slabs to retain a feel for what the site was like, but remove the rest to make way for habitat restoration. Native trees were planted in long rows along the remaining slabs and where the other slabs were to retain a linear feel. The next task was to explain the concrete slabs' story and significance because just looking at them, no one would know what they were for. A future interpretive panel will explain the slabs to visitors.



Figure 6.14: Concrete slabs (used for railroad car maintenance) extant at the Vento Sanctuary

The neighborhood was already home to a strong value of historical places and of the stories of those places. There were many programs highlighting local history and helping homeowners to restore their historic houses. Some examples include the semi-annual Dayton's Bluff Vacant Home Tour (organized to advertise the wonderful historic homes available and reduce the impacts of foreclosures on the neighborhood), guides for walking tours of historic Swede Hollow, Dayton's Bluff, and Third Street neighborhoods, and home purchase and rehabilitation assistance from Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services . A strong sense of local history was an important piece of local identity and flowed from local residents instrumental in planning into the vision and final development of the Vento site. The Community Vision plan for the site stated that "The land's history would be interpreted and kept alive to enrich visitors with a sense of place and belonging" (Pitz 2001 [no page numbers]). Carey related that the project "fit in with

the development values and community values that people on the steering committee had” already and that “it’s about place and character – building on what came before” (Carey 2009). It should be noted here that Carol Carey, chair of the project steering committee, is also the executive director of Historic St. Paul, a non-profit historic preservation advocacy group whose mission is “to preserve, protect and enhance the historic character of Saint Paul neighborhoods” (Historic Saint Paul 2010). Historic Saint Paul was one of the partner organizations in the development of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary; they also sponsored the educational panels in the sign circle at the entrance to the sanctuary.

The ties to local immigrant/blue collar neighborhoods are also important. Some are still extant such as Dayton’s Bluff and Railroad Island, others are not such as Swede Hollow and Connemara Patch (between the sanctuary and Swede Hollow, many homes here were lost to railroad expansion and the rest were razed in the 1950s through eminent domain prior to construction of I-94). These neighborhoods, particularly Swede Hollow, still play a very important role in the East Side’s identity as a place. The role of the former railroad yards as a place of employment is very closely tied to these residential areas (see map in Chapter 5 for locations of these neighborhoods).

Layers of historical stories exist at the site, some more visible than others. Foundations of the Northstar Brewery are evident near the bluff and visitors can peer into the opening of Brewery Cave, a natural cave that was reshaped for use by the brewery to age and store beer. Archeologists discovered these foundations during the historical research for Section 106 (see below). The Northstar Brewery, founded in 1855, was one of St. Paul’s earliest breweries (Terrell and Vermeer 2004). This brewery was a

predecessor of the company that went on to become Jacob Schmidt Brewing Company, a fixture on the East Side of St. Paul for decades. The historical consultants recommended the brewery site as eligible for listing on the National Register for Historic Places and any work that may disturb the site should be done under consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (Terrell and Vermeer 2004).

The Vento site contains a cave, Wakan Tipi, which is considered to be a sacred place to local Native American groups. Wakan Tipi is a difficult term to translate from the Dakota to English. Tipi means “dwelling place” and Wakan is sometimes translated as “sacred”, “spirit”, or “holy”. Other sources translate it as “the dwelling place of the Great Spirit” (Pitz 2001) or “spirit house” (Clark 2008). Because the Dakota world view sees the earth as mother, “caves represent the places where we were born from our mother” or “the heart of our mother” (Rice 2009). This particular cave is especially significant in Dakota creation stories and Wakan Tipi is considered the “Garden of Eden” of the Dakota peoples (Rice 2009). Because of federal funding, the project was required to do a Section 106 review<sup>26</sup>. This review triggered the notification of the four federally recognized Dakota tribes in the area to consult on the project and their representatives were involved throughout the planning and interpretive process.

This site within the site has proven to be the most contentious. The steering committee is dedicated to sensitively interpreting all of the sites and stories within the project area, but the research revealed two conflicting stories and their accompanying values overlapped one site. Wakan Tipi was a natural cave sacred to Native American

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<sup>26</sup> Section 106 refers to a part of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and is a regulation enacted to prevent and mitigate adverse affect on historic properties by federal undertakings. See also Chapter 2, page 28 for more info on Section 106. In both Minnesota and Kentucky, the state historic preservation office (SHPO) works with the federal agency and local partners on Section 106 reviews.

tribes who called the area home for thousands of years prior to European settlement. The cave was later renamed Carver's Cave after an early explorer. In St. Paul's early days, breweries developed along the river making use of the springs for their waters and the caves to store and age the beer. Wakan Tipi was enlarged and altered to serve this purpose. As the breweries moved off the site, the railroads also altered the cave as they carved off the face of the bluff to enlarge the flat area for rail yards. The ecological value of the site and the restoration work meshes well with the Native American stories tied to the site; the healing of the land is metaphoric for the healing of relationships between Native and Euro-American peoples through the process of renewing this site. For example, a good deal of symbolic significance is tied to the bald eagle among Dakota people (Brooke 1996). As Mr. Rice was drumming and singing at the opening to Wakan Tipi during a Sanctuary open house event in Fall 2009, an eagle flew overhead. He was excited to see it and switched to a song that honored the eagle. Eagle populations have increased in the Mississippi River valley in recent decades; some nests have been identified very near to downtown St. Paul (though not in the Vento Sanctuary).

The conflicting values and stories revealed during the Section 106 research revolve around the relationship between Native American land use and histories and the settlement of White Europeans with their alcohol industries. It is both a literal and symbolic story told here of the way that alcohol obliterated Native American culture. Through the research both Wakan Tipi and the ruins of the Northstar Brewery were deemed eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

It was also difficult because there is no one representative voice of "the Dakota" peoples, but instead there are many disparate groups that are "the Dakota." Leonard

Wabasha, cultural resources director for the Mdewakanton Dakota Community in nearby Shakopee, Minnesota, has worked consistently with the steering committee and on the Section 106 process (Carey 2009). He also led a tour of the site during the 2007 National Trust for Historic Preservation conference that was held in St. Paul (Clark 2009).

Even though it was a difficult situation, unlike typical Section 106 processes, the owners of the site were not proposing to destroy or pave over significant sites (most Section 106 research is tied to highway projects). Their intent was to maintain, restore, reconnect, and interpret. The process, therefore, was easier but is not complete. There is no consensus on how the cave and brewery ruin sites should be interpreted to the public through signage (see extant signs in photos 6.13, 6.14, and 6.15). There is an immense range of time included in the eras of significance of the site and a large range of values. There was no pressure to choose just one period of significance for the site, though Sarah Clark mentioned that it seems like the “period of significance always seems to be placed at when the white guys start building things” (Clark 2009). The steering committee has left the interpretation piece open and will continue to work with tribal representatives. They hope to be able to tell the story without glossing over the “hard parts” (Carey 2009).



Figure 6.15: Half of the sign circle at entrance to Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary



Figure 6.16: Interpretive sign



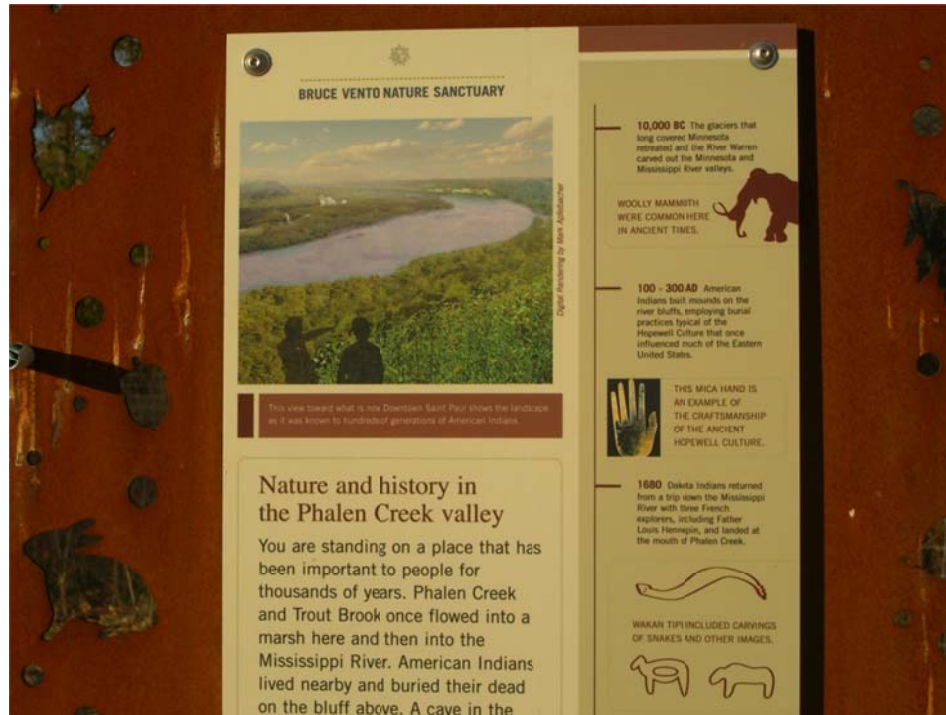


Figure 6.17: Details the signs in the sign circle. The top one highlights how the community was involved and the bottom one highlights the importance of the site to generations of Native people.

There are also plans to erect an interpretive sign by the oak woodland restoration area, in addition to the runways sign. Even these two relatively straightforward signs will take “many stakeholder meetings” to plan and carry out (Clark 2009). These two new signs will be in addition to the “sign circle” that was erected when the site opened to the public in 2005. These signs greet visitors entering from the parking area and are arranged in a circle around the trail entranceway. These signs address the history of the site, the process of rehabilitating its ecology, the significance of Wakan Tipi to Native American peoples, and the way that the neighborhood has been involved in the redevelopment of the area. The content, as well as the arrangement and presentation of the signs, was the result of a “real multiple stakeholder process” involving the steering committee, local residents, and Dakota representatives. The circle format was an idea that the tribal

representatives advocated; circles are culturally symbolic and significant and it was a way to honor their culture's presence in this place. While these signs mention the sacred Wakan Tipi site briefly, they were not a "hot-button issue" like the signs they would like to design for the actual cave entrance (Clark 2009). In my observation, many visitors to the site read the signs as they entered, but it was not a significant survey. The site planners hope that the interpretive signs will help visitors to understand that this place holds deep importance to Minnesota's ecological story, settlement history, its industrial growth, and also sacred significance to Native people. Their hope is that the signs will expand visitors' views of the site from "a nice trail and park" to encompass these areas of significance, but of course that goal can only be accomplished if people read the signs. Even unread signs have an effect on viewers as signs create an impression that a place is Important or Historic. Lowenthal (1979: 111) writes that signs "make the visible past feel more like the written record."

The City of St. Paul, in creating the landscape plan for the site, decided how to protect the Wakan Tipi site, but didn't make any decisions beyond that. Don Ganje, a landscape architect from the St. Paul Park and Recreation department related that they just left the existing, unattractive metal wall across the cave entrance: "we left that in place because the tribes, really to this date, still don't know what they want to do with it, how they want to interpret it. So we have a lot of work left to do on that particular interpretation part of this" (Ganje 2009).

Local Native American groups still use the site for annual meetings and ceremonies. Jim Rice, a member of the Sisseton Dakota tribe, held his wedding there in

2005 and he and his wife planted a cottonwood tree near the entrance of the cave to mark and celebrate their marriage.



Figure 6.18: Jim Rice drums and sings near entrance to Wakan Tipi, 10/09. He is looking up at a bald eagle flying overhead. The cave is off to the left and in the foreground is the cottonwood tree he and his wife planted at their wedding ceremony.

In this discussion of the values and meanings that intersect at the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary we have seen the way values mattered there during the planning stage, continue to matter in how the place is used every day, and how the interpretation of the values to the public continues to be worked out. This example defines the idea “values in place” as we examine each of the pieces of the landscape, how they were developed, and how they relate the past to present visitors. Without anyone involved in the Vento project purposefully saying they were employing the methods of values-based preservation, this case study is an ideal example of how values-based preservation works, why it works well, and the way it can respond to myriad and shifting stakeholder values. In the setting

of cultural geography lineage, this step of delving into the meanings and values in place is an important part of the critical humanistic geography endeavor; one must examine what meanings are in a place, how those meanings shift and differ from group to group, and how they came to be, in order to understand the landscape.

In the context of Schein's framework for landscape interpretation this step of discerning and investigating the meanings and values with which people imbue landscapes is an essential bridge between the first step of telling the biography of the landscape and the final steps of examining the way that the landscape facilitates and mediates ideas and values and materializes stakeholder discourses in place (Schein 2009). We will move on to these final steps in Chapter 7.

## **Chapter 7 : Landscapes and community values**

In this chapter I will contextualize my three study sites in relation to step three and step four of Schein's (2009) methodological framework for interpreting landscapes. These steps are: examining the landscape as a facilitator/mediator and examining the landscape as discourse materialized. I employ three organizing themes across the three case studies: landscapes that make things happen (facilitate), landscapes that bring people and ideas together (mediate), and landscapes that physically manifest community and national values (discourses materialized).

When I write about landscapes making things happen, it is in the sense that things are said or done in a new way, in a way that would not have been possible had that landscape not been the way that it is now. This is not in the sense that the landscape is actually doing something; it is not active, but its presence and its use and the act of creating it can cause changes. But in the same sense that we study landscapes as texts (Duncan 1990), we understand landscapes to “do” things in the way that the written word can “do” things. Words cause people to act, words elicit emotions both positive and negative, words lodge in the heart and mind, and words help to shape who we are and want to become. Places “do” these things as well, even though they are not living, acting things. Landscapes are our “unwitting autobiographies” (Lewis 1979) in the sense that they are stories already written but landscapes are also discourses materialized (Schein 1997) in the sense that they are being rewritten all the time. Landscapes are not just the text, but are also the author as they shape social relations, community values, and function as normative forces (Schein 2003).

For mediation I interpret this to mean the way that landscapes both figuratively and literally bring people together. Figuratively refers more to ideas: what ideas are expressed to the public through a trail landscape? Ideas about the past, about the natural world, about health or recreation, and ideas about cultures are just a few of the possibilities. Literally, trails bring people together within the space of the trail; people come together in the social space of the trail and through the process of cooperation to plan and maintain the trail.

### **Muhlenberg County Rail Trail**

The trail landscape in Muhlenberg County served both to mediate between disparate ideas of what should be done with the abandoned rail line (no trail! and yes trail!) and to facilitate a paradigm shift in the communities. The rail trail is now almost universally supported and has brought a new set of strengthened values for recreation, exercise, and wellness. Kentucky is perennially at the bottom of state lists when it comes to quality of life, health outcomes, child health, obesity, incidence of disease, and so on. The reasons for these conditions are the subjects of numerous other dissertations, but part of it is related to infrastructure – do people have access to places to exercise and develop healthy habits? Residents of Muhlenberg County saw the potential of the trail as a place to exercise as it was under construction; indeed, the trail was heavily in use even before the official grand opening.

### **Landscape that makes things happen**

#### **Paradigm shifts**

In the case of the Muhlenberg County Rail Trail, the trail landscape facilitated a change in the community and the values held there. This place made possible a paradigm

change where recreation – safe, accessible, outdoor recreation – became something of great value to the community after the initial trail proposal was vehemently opposed. Tied to this was a paradigm shift about health and wellness and the need to have readily available ways to address some of the dire health problems facing Kentuckians, many of which can be addressed, at least partially, through regular exercise. The trail landscape helped to accomplish what probably already was an issue on the minds of local residents: a need for safe and healthy recreation, but the means for accomplishing that did not exist prior to the trail.

### **Health and wellness, recreation, and quality of life**

Active living<sup>27</sup> as a way to wellness through the space of the rail trail is at the core of this paradigm shift. Newspaper articles and ads pointed towards the health benefits of trail walking. The local department of health campaign for “Get Moving, Start Losing” in which the county was challenged to lose a collective 1,000 pounds revolved around trail walking. All of these things show that the discourses of health and wellness, active living, and recreation are being facilitated in the local community through this trail landscape. They are being interpreted on their own terms.

Several times per year Kentucky is reported at or near the bottom of various health, education, well being, or general quality of life measures. Kentucky is ranked seventh in the nation for adult obesity rates at 29 percent, fourth for child obesity rates (37.1 percent), seventh for rates of diabetes among adults (9.9 percent), and second for

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<sup>27</sup> Active Living by Design is a movement, founded and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that “creates community-led change by working with local and national partners to build a culture of active living and healthy eating.” The movement’s vision is to help create “healthy communities, where routine physical activity and healthy eating are accessible, easy and affordable to everyone” (activelivingbydesign.org).

physical inactivity (30.4 percent of adults physically inactive) according to a survey completed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Trust for America's Health (Levi et al 2009). Conversely, Minnesota ranked 51st in physical inactivity with 16.3 percent of adults reporting an inactive lifestyle (out of 50 states and Washington D.C.). Kids Count data (Kids Count Data Center 2010) puts Kentucky at forty-first in the nation on overall child well being measures.

*Forbes* (Ruiz 2009, citing Healthways/Gallup survey) ranked Minnesota in first place for physical health and fifth for the well being index. Kentucky was at forty-ninth – even Mississippi ranked higher in the well being index (at forty-eighth – a rare exception to the “thank God for Mississippi” clause to these types of surveys). Kentucky ranked forty-ninth out of fifty for physical health as well.

Within the state of Kentucky, Muhlenberg County has not fared well. In *The Health of Kentucky: A County Assessment* the county was ranked number 100 out of 120 counties on a variety of health measures including health outcomes, health care access, and behavioral factors (Kentucky Institute of Medicine 2007). Some of the behavioral factors such as the prevalence of diabetes, obesity, smoking, and a lack of physical activity were higher than the national average; almost twice as many county residents (47 percent) lacked physical activity compared to the national average (24 percent).

Though the development of the Muhlenberg County rail trail was not directly in response to these types of reports, they are part of the environment in which support for the trail has grown. Indeed, the trail was featured on a Kentucky Educational Television series called *The CommonHealth of Kentucky*. This show touted the health benefits of



rail trails in general and visited the Muhlenberg County trail to highlight its success in providing a place for safe recreation to people of all ages and abilities (KET 2004).

National rail trail (and trails in general) groups align themselves as an important part of quality of life and improving a community's (and its residents') health (Rails to Trails Conservancy 2008, Wilkinson, et al 2002). A fact sheet published by the Rails to Trails Conservancy speaks of an Alabama trail that "touched off a health revival" in its community after it provided a safe place for exercise – something not available prior to its opening (Rails to Trails Conservancy n.d.).

### **From the medical establishment to the public**

Evidence of this paradigm shift is found in who has supported the trail along the way. An early supporter and member of the steering committee is Rebecca Keith, a local nurse practitioner. She calls exercise "the fountain of youth" and goes on to say that "[p]eople that exercise daily look younger, feel younger, stay younger, because they are healthier, they can move, they can do the things they want to do and they enjoy life a lot more" (KET 2004). She and other local health professionals prescribe trail walking to their patients as a way to improve their health. This message of exercise is expanding from the medical establishment across the local community to include young people, and everyday regular folks who before may not have given much thought to the value of active living. Some of the initial opposition to the trail was the perception that it would only be used by the "spandex super fit types" and wasn't for the rest of the people but this idea was quickly dismissed after the trail opened (Kirtley 2004a and 2004b). This is one example of the trail's role as a normative landscape, a place that suggests what ought to be (Schein 2003).

The Muhlenberg County Rail Trail also helped to facilitate a shift in ideas about trails in general in Kentucky. The trail continues to work as a facilitator of further rail trail development around the state and region (particularly through the work of former Judge Executive Kirtley). Recent evidence of this is found in the list of Muhlenberg County projects funded through their share of the state’s Coal Severance Tax revenues. Four of the fourteen projects funded in 2010 included some aspect of pedestrian facilities including new walking trails in local parks, sidewalks, or paving existing trails (Kentucky Legislative Research Commission 2010).



Figure 7.1: Walkers on the Greenville end of the Muhlenberg County Rail Trail (photo courtesy of Rodney Kirtley)

The construction of the Muhlenberg County Rail Trail facilitated some actual landscape alterations, as well as paradigm alterations. Property owners whose yards backed the trail cleaned them up and reoriented to the new “main street” in their back

yards. Residents are known to sit in lawn chairs facing the trail to be able to say hello to their neighbors passing by (Kirtley 2004b). Business owners adjacent to the trail, such as the used car dealer, reoriented their products to the trail walking customers, away from the fast moving automobile traffic. New small businesses opened to serve trail users. In these cases the landscape was actually altered directly because of the presence of trail. None of these changes to the cultural landscape of Muhlenberg County would have happened had the rail line been left as an abandoned and overgrown corridor.

### **Landscape that brings people and ideas together**

The Muhlenberg County rail trail serves to bring the concept of active living to the local population, in a place that previous to this trail had little opportunity for safe, free, off-road exercise. The project did not import a “foreign” version of exercise and recreation, but allowed the community to take ownership: recreation on their own terms. These terms include coveralls instead of spandex and Wal-mart bicycles instead of expensive road bikes, for example. The presence of the trail landscape brought the people of Muhlenberg County together with the idea and practice of active living.

The idea of rail trails in general was an unknown in much of Kentucky at the time this trail was built. Now the popularity of this trail is serving to spur rail trail development elsewhere in Kentucky. It serves as a useful and practical model to mediate these ideas “from outside” about rail trails to communities around the Commonwealth (Big Lovely and Big Sandy trails in central/eastern Kentucky, for example). The further expansion of the rail trail network in Kentucky owes some credit to the way that this project mediated the idea of successful rail trail projects to the state. In a state where we had to define the very idea of “rail trails” to state legislators, the advertising effects of

this project cannot be understated.<sup>28</sup> The railroad artifacts that were left intact and the ones brought in to reconstruct a historic railroad landscape serve to communicate local history to the public; once again on their own terms through the way they used local volunteers who were former railroad employees.

In Muhlenberg County the trail acts literally to bring people together. It serves as an important social space in the small communities it serves. Mothers come together there with their children, friends and relatives gather to visit and exercise together, school and community events take place on the trail. The towns of Greenville, Central City, and Powderly are close-knit, small communities with a rich community life. It is not as if the trail created a social space where none existed before, but it did create a new social space that enriches the social life of the community in a way that is highly valued and heavily used there by all ages of people.

### **Landscape that physically manifests values from the community and beyond**

#### **Discourses of history**

The discourses of history and other paths to the past are present at the Muhlenberg County Rail Trail too. Connecting present users with past railroad history is one of the primary goals of trail managers. From the extant railroad artifacts such as signal towers and whistle signs to the placement of a Paducah and Louisville Railroad caboose at one of the trailheads, users can interact with authentic railroad historic features. But beyond the authentic are two other interesting pieces: the covered bridge and the notice boards. Neither of these is original, of course. The notice boards were built purposely with hip

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<sup>28</sup> Hearing before the Kentucky Interim Joint Committee on Economic Development and Tourism, July 15, 2004. I, along with other representatives from the Kentucky Rails to Trails Council presented about the benefits and obstacles to rail trail development. We began with a definition of trails and photos of successful projects. The legislators had many questions on the concept before we moved on to discussing the benefits. It was eye-opening for both sides.

roofs and town signs reminiscent of traditional railroad depots. The bridge was built without any specific railroad inspiration, but just as a “historic-looking” place that has turned out to be one of the most popular and attractive parts of the whole trail project.



Figure 7.2: Notice board at the Greenville trailhead  
(Photo courtesy of Rodney Kirtley)

People engage with historic discourses along the trail mainly through interaction with the historic railroad artifacts and the reconstructed historically-inspired features. Trail users I interviewed along the trail mentioned how much their children enjoyed climbing on the caboose and playing on it and the covered bridge. Not many users would say that using the “depot-inspired” notice boards constitutes engaging with a historic discourse, but there is a satisfaction and pride and sense of fun associated with these features that is important. These “unimportant” items in the landscape are also important

for us, as students of places and the cultures that create them, to examine<sup>29</sup>. The whole enterprise of moving in a caboose and other railroad memorabilia and building a platform around it to evoke a train station was another way the public engages with history through this landscape. The plan was for the caboose to serve as a small railroad history museum and a video of reminiscences was created, but I'm unsure if this museum is open regularly to the public. The way that local schools and the public library use the site as part of education on local history is another way that people engage with historical discourses here. These "inauthentic" and "unhistorical" features in the historic railroad corridor are much more significant than meets the eye. They anchor the historic site (railroad) to the present through their importance as community and family gathering places. History for many people is viewed through the local lens: their own families and communities. Glassberg writes "the histories that matter most to us are the familiar ones, populated by our families" (2001: 208).

### **Discourse of nature**

The way that rural Kentuckians enjoy the great outdoors varies widely, like anywhere else, but ATVs are a very popular outdoor recreation activity as is hunting and fishing. It was very important for the trail managers (the county, in this case) to compromise with the ATV users in the area. The trail itself is not open to motorized vehicles (except in the case of Judge Executive's personal cars! [see Chapter 5] and emergency vehicles), but the trail right of way provides access to some key ATV areas in some of the reclaimed mining lands and mine haul roads. The trail managers decided to

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<sup>29</sup> Peirce Lewis writes "Caution! If a scholar starts studying elephant-shaped hotels, he is likely to be denounced, or ridiculed, or pointedly ignored by self-styled 'serious scholars,' ... Students of landscape must learn to ignore such folk ... so keep your eyes open, and remember that you're trying to understand nothing less serious (or less funny) than American culture" (1979: 30).

continue to allow ATV access across and along the trail in order to compromise with the ATV users and to prevent future acts of destruction that may come out of a feeling of vengeance and being completely barred from the trail (Kirtley 2004a and 2004b). But, they did have to draw the line and bar another popular activity from the trail – no compromises there. Notice the green sign in the picture below; it reminds users to leave their firearms at home.



Figure 7.3: Near the Central City trailhead  
(Photo courtesy of Rodney Kirtley)

People using the trail engage with this discourse by fishing or bird watching from the trail or by passively enjoying the natural areas (reclaimed) along the trail while walking or biking. Others engage with nature through education as they bring children to learn about animals, plant life, or ecosystems. Even the ATV users who intersect with the trail corridor on their way to ride in the abandoned mine areas are, in their own way,

valuing the nature discourse of the trail. They are of course in some cases also hastening its destruction, but even users with an oppositional discourse (as pedestrian trail and ATV trail advocates often are) sometimes have the same values for the same place.

### **Broader discourses materialized through local landscapes**

In what way does the trail landscape mediate national agendas or discourses to the Muhlenberg County public? It's difficult to think about the Muhlenberg County rail trail outside of the larger context of rails to trails across the US and the national Rails to Trails Conservancy. This trail would never have happened without their technical support and the support of the Kentucky Rails to Trails Council. But it also never would have happened if legislation such as the railbanking laws had not been in place. The RTC has been instrumental in supporting this legislation and working with landowners and trail managers as the law has been challenged in court. Kentucky is hardly a groundbreaker when it comes to rail trail development, so we can see that the larger rails to trails movement has influenced Kentucky communities as they see what other places have done with their abandoned rail trails. The Muhlenberg County Rail Trail is a local, physical manifestation of the larger discourse and value for preservation of abandoned railroad corridors as advocated by organizations such as the Rails to Trails Conservancy and the Kentucky Rails to Trails Council. Unlike the Minnesota case study, there was little influence from other state agencies here in Muhlenberg County in relation to trails. The state Department of Natural Resources does not have the same responsibility for trail management as the Minnesota DNR. In Kentucky this agency oversees forestry, mining, conservation, and land preservation. The Kentucky State Parks oversee trails within state



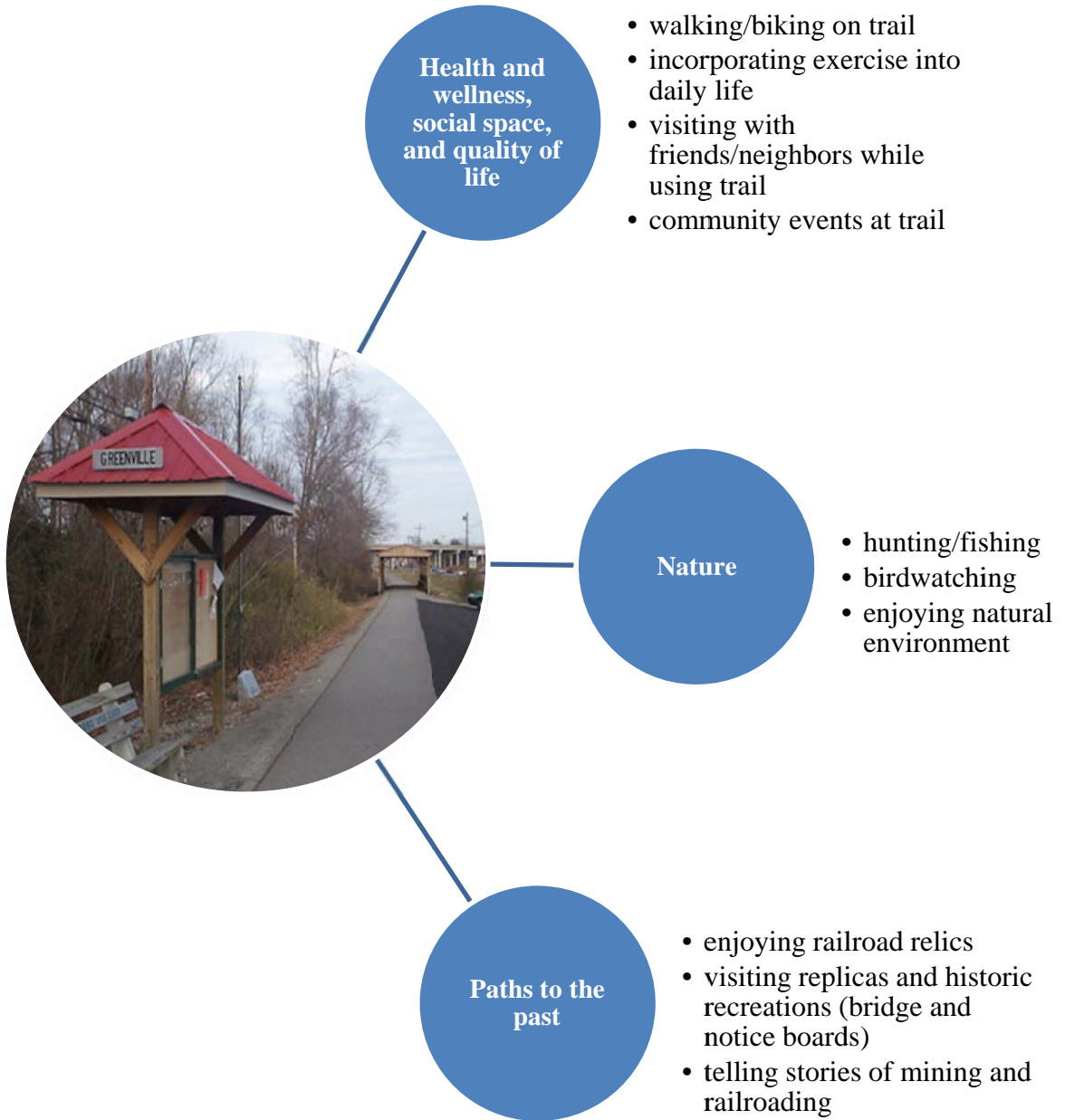
parks, but these tend to be shorter trails, not the long connecting state trails that the state of Minnesota manages in addition to state parks.

The larger discourse of historic preservation through the filter of the Kentucky Heritage Council or the National Trust for Historic Preservation is less evident in Muhlenberg County than in the other two case studies. Aside from the initial finding of no impact in the Section 106 review completed at abandonment, these organizations had limited involvement in this particular corridor. The trail has no extant railroad buildings and no other adjacent (officially designated) historic structures.

The theme that keeps appearing in study of the Muhlenberg rail trail is “on its own terms.” The values woven through this trail landscape have roots beyond the community and connections regionally and nationally, but the interpretation is unique. On each of the three main values materialized here: values for nature, for wellness, and for history, each are interpreted in a distinct way that reflects the community. This message is a powerful one in Kentucky (and elsewhere) as the story of this trail is relayed around the state: your trail isn’t about people coming in from outside saying you have to only enjoy it from your expensive bikes with spandex outfits. You can walk in your boots after work and enjoy visiting with your neighbors. So too with nature appreciation and historic features; these examples illustrate that there is room for local interpretation and negotiation to accommodate the local values.

# Muhlenberg County Rail Trail

Values in Place and ways the public engages with them



### **Oldham County Greenways**

In a place in transition from small towns and horse farms to suburbia, trails similar to those developed and proposed by Greenways for Oldham County serve a different purpose and fulfill different needs than trails in places like Muhlenberg County. In Oldham County the trails are envisioned as an important piece of development: a way to both attract amenity-focused homebuyers and also preserve some features of the landscape deemed valuable to long-time residents as well as new ones.

### **Landscape that makes things happen**

Oldham County Greenways give an example of a community envisioning the potential of their trail to be a hedge against the change that population growth and suburban development have brought to the area. Here trails are valued not only for what they are but what they are perceived to be able to do: preserve and enhance aspects of the natural and cultural landscape that give the place its essential and attractive character that drew the new residents in the first place.

### **Historic preservation / landscape preservation**

The greenways in Oldham County facilitate a vision that the residents have for their home: the vision to preserve the “rural feel” of a place that is rapidly suburbanizing and securely in the orbit of a large metropolitan area. For the most part, when we talk about “preservation” and trails, we think of historic preservation of depots, bridges, and the corridor itself. Those are all keenly relevant here, but part of a larger story of land and landscape and identity preservation through the setting aside of greenspace in a place where rural land is being developed quickly and dramatically.

So far, the trails are more of a hedge against landscape change from development. The pieces currently in place: downtown LaGrange's six tenths of a mile (mostly on sidewalks), Wendell Moore Park's trails, and the Commerce Parkway segment, are not particularly significant when it comes to preserving greenspace. It is the vision for the trail network that is significant here when it comes to landscape preservation. Future plans envision the trails playing a more active role in preserving viewsheds and natural habitat corridors. As for historic preservation, the restoration of the abandoned Louisville and Nashville Railroad depot in downtown LaGrange was a centerpiece of the first phase of trail development and is the only aspect of historic preservation included in the trails so far (albeit an important piece!).

### **Quality of life, recreation, and alternative transportation**

The plan for this network of trails also facilitates the vision for a quality of life in the county that includes alternative transportation options and recreational facilities that are accessible to all (both geographically and in design/features). The vision statement of Greenways for Oldham County reads "to encourage the creation of trails and greenway corridors, parks, and preserves in order to enhance and conserve the quality of life for the citizens and wildlife of Oldham County" (Greenways for Oldham County 2010). All three of these points are interconnected – quality of life is tied to more recreational opportunities, and more transportation options increases the quality of life of residents at all stages of life from childhood to the elderly.

The new trail network facilitates this vision in each of its three parts. At the Commerce Parkway section, the new trail connects a commercial area (with movie theater, restaurants, and strip malls) to the new library, a future school site, future

subdivisions, a church, the county health department, and two Park and TARC facilities. The Wendell Moore Park trails provide increased access for outdoor recreation to area seniors. These trails are in one quarter, one half, and one mile loops and are adjacent to the county senior/community center. They feature level surfaces and benches for resting. Also in Wendell Moore Park are an array of recreation opportunities such as a pool, fishing lake, playgrounds, golf course, picnic grounds, ball fields, and tennis courts. The downtown LaGrange trail segment doesn't really provide any new connections other than to the restored depot, but a future trail will connect to the Commerce Parkway segment.



Figure 7.4: Trails under construction at Wendell Moore Park  
Photo courtesy of Greenways for Oldham County

## **Landscape that brings people and ideas together**

### **Historic preservation/landscape preservation and new growth**

Trails in Oldham County serve as a tool to mediate between the desire and necessity (and inevitability) of commercial and residential development and the desire to retain aspects of tradition, history, and the “feel” of the place. They are means toward the goal of preventing a total transformation of the county away from what residents love about it. Trails are tools embraced by the local units of government and by local developers from both directions: because they care about the place but also because they understand that the availability of nearby trails raises property values, makes communities attractive to potential residents, and improve quality of life. They are a smart business and political decision.

But, it doesn't mean that trails in the county will provide a solution to the tension between the suburban development status quo and landscape preservation interests. Trails merely allow another outlet for these competing discourses to work themselves out and find some common ground. With or without trails these conversations would go on. An acceptance of trails and inclusion of connections to them in new subdivisions doesn't mean they are any closer to embracing other tenets of smart growth. Trails are a point of agreement for development people. Whether you support the status quo subdivisions or smart growth or somewhere in between, most agree that trails are good for their bottom line and are marketable amenities that increase property values and the desirability of their properties.

### **Landscape that physically manifests values from the community and beyond**

Many different stakeholder groups in Oldham County share the same vision for the place (or at least their visions overlap) so to examine the different discourses and the ways they are materialized on the landscape is a matter of seeing these overlapping and concurrent ideas and parsing out what is shared and what is not. When the landscape in question looks like the one below (see Figure 7.4) it can be difficult to see evidence of the myriad discourses materialized here; it is just a ten foot wide ribbon of asphalt paralleling a rural highway. But this is a landscape in flux and one where its managers and owners are working in anticipation of significant change. The adjacent properties are zoned for commercial, residential, and other development and soon this trail will be an important element in a complex suburban neighborhood.



Figure 7.5: Commerce Parkway trail segment, shortly after 2009 completion

### **Landscape preservation/historic preservation**

The discourse of rural landscape preservation is materialized through the development of Oldham County greenways. These corridors contribute to the goal of preserving park and greenspace – and planning well for that preservation – long before development occurs. Some of the benefits put forward by Greenways for Oldham County (GOC) include wildlife habitat preservation and stream buffer protection. GOC states that the greenways will, “protect environmentally important lands and native plants and animals, [and] also link people with the natural world and outdoor recreational opportunities” (Greenways for Oldham County 2010). The goal of landscape preservation is two-fold: both in the sense of conservation for habitats and environmental protection but also to preserve some of the character the elements of the natural environment provided to the place. These elements included open fields and vistas, stands of trees, and creek valleys, for example. Some evidence of this is in the choices for trail furniture and signage elements. As discussed in previous chapters, these elements hearken to the surrounding landscapes of horse farms and historic limestone foundations.

The other facet of preservation expressed through this landscape is that of historic preservation. The acquisition and restoration of the Louisville and Nashville RR depot in LaGrange in Phase I of the project was the historic preservation centerpiece of the Oldham County project. Historic preservation is clearly something that is important to communities in the county – especially LaGrange. Their historic downtown and neighborhoods are a major asset to tourism and sense of place. Through the efforts of the Main Street program and the local chamber of commerce, the town has done much to promote its historic streetscape. The community identity is built to a large degree on the



historic downtown/railroad landscape (“We’re on track” town motto). Less tangible is the relationship to the old interurban railway. This route was abandoned more than seventy years ago and residents do not identify with it in the same way that they do with the still active railroad down Main Street LaGrange. Some of the greenway route follows the path of this abandoned interurban line, and more was planned, but now it appears that route is not very practical or cost effective and other more tenable routes will be pursued. While visitors to the trail segment in downtown LaGrange may appreciate the way the trail furniture complements the local architecture, they likely do not see the choice of limestone block benches and square bollards as purposely evocative of the area’s urban and rural historic landscapes (see Figure 7.6).



Figure 7.6: Oldham County Greenway on west edge of downtown LaGrange.  
Photo courtesy of Oldham County Greenways

### **“Rural way of life” in light of development**

There are conflicting values in Oldham – those who support development in the status quo (large lots, subdivisions, \$500,000 homes, built in rural and natural areas) and those who see development running roughshod over the natural and agricultural environments. A recent subdivision was approved for land that had been zoned as conservation land. Neighbors were understandably opposed to this development. Developers did have to make some concessions for open space and hooking up to city water and sewer. The old irony here of course is that realtors marketing homes in some of the hundreds of subdivisions use language such as: “The rolling hills give you unbelievable views of neighboring farms” (The Schafer Team 2009). Groups such as Oldham Ahead are trying to preserve those views, hills, and farms from the likes of The Schafer Team! A long-time local resident remarked “What everybody was drawn to originally was the rural character of this county and now it’s gone” (Komis 2005). This value for the rural character of the area paradoxically goes hand in hand with the next value, that of attracting residents to the area. These values are in constant tension.

### **Quality of life: Attractive place to mobile suburbanites**

One factor that drives the support and development for a trail network in Oldham County is a desire on the part of planners and leaders to be competitive in the suburban marketplace. The communities in the county and their attendant housing developments compete for the projected additional 30,000 residents in the county by 2025. The Louisville Metropolitan area is home to 1.2 million people, the largest metro area in the state (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). The metro area includes Jefferson County (which contains the city itself), five counties across the Ohio River in Indiana, and eight other counties in Kentucky. Oldham County leadership knows they are competing with many

other attractive suburban residential areas around the metro area including Bullitt, Shelby, and Spencer County. Planners and developers have discovered that it takes more than lovely homes and pleasant vistas to attract homeowners. It takes good schools, convenient commercial and civic amenities, and features attractive to young and active residents such as trails, parks, walkable communities, and multiple transportation options.

Trails around the country have been positioned as major amenities to attract residents to communities. They have been proven to raise (or at least help to sustain) property values for properties adjacent to them. In homeowner communities driven by the almighty property value, this is a very important selling point, perhaps even more important than the actual physical health benefit or recreational enjoyment benefit! The use of trails seems irrelevant; it is the appearance of trails and greenspace that boosts property values. The hope is for an eventual well developed network of trails instead of these piecemeal trail segments that lead nowhere and connect little.

### **Broader discourses materialized through local landscapes**

In what way does the trail landscape mediate national agendas or discourses to the Oldham County public? Some of the broader discourses manifest through the Oldham County Greenways include historic preservation (both state and national), and different ideas about growth, development, and land preservation.

Within historic preservation, there are a number of different voices present in the area. LaGrange has an active Main Street program and has received numerous state and national grants funding preservation projects. The entire downtown area is listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. And though the extent is unclear, the Kentucky Heritage Council had some influence on Phase One of the trail

project and the restoration of the Louisville and Nashville RR depot. Much of the local discourse on the character of the town of LaGrange centers on its historic buildings and streetscape and the presence of the railroad through town. This discourse on historic preservation ties in closely with discussions on landscape preservation as groups focus on the historic horse farm/agricultural landscape of the county that is threatened by further development.

While I observed almost no references to smart growth as a label for the type of growth advocated by some in the county, elements of it were certainly present<sup>30</sup>. This seemed to be counter to the continued development of “status quo” subdivisions that lacked connections to other places, consisted of large lots, were not mixed use, and were almost entirely auto-dependent. Surveys of residents (done as part of the Trails and Greenways Master Plan in 2008) hint at desires for something different, for more connectivity and walkability in the area. Organizations such as Friends of Westport and Oldham Ahead advocate for a form of development closely akin to smart growth. Though again, they do not refer to it as such; using more commonly the phrase “growth management”.

Oldham County is a place in transition; it is experiencing significant change to its land use, population, and economic base in light of suburban growth as a bedroom community to Metropolitan Louisville. There is conflict and overlap between goals and visions for the county; greenways are one example of this. Trails and parks are seen as both a hedge against the changes in land use but also as a way to attract residents and

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<sup>30</sup> Most references to “smart growth” or “sprawl” I saw were in articles in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and in the *Oldham Era*, though Oldham Ahead had a section of “smart growth links and organizations” on its website and I saw one online PowerPoint presentation on smart growth by Oldham County Planning director Louise Allen.

investment to the county. This paradox will continue to be worked out as growth advances in the area. The hope is that trails can serve to mitigate some of the negative aspects of suburban growth.

# Oldham County Greenways

Values in Place and ways the public engages with them



### **Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary**

The Vento case in Minnesota is in sharp contrast to the Kentucky case studies because of the context within which it was developed. In a state/region with long-standing values for trails it was not as much of a fight to build it in the first place (as it was in Muhlenberg County). Instead, it is yet another testament to the dominant paradigm that is trails and alternative transportation in Minnesota. Other key themes at Vento include mediation between Native American and Euro-American cultures and histories and connections between people and nature.

### **Landscape that makes things happen**

The values facilitated through the Vento site include a new focus on environmental awareness to the youth of the East Side – students who otherwise wouldn't have many local opportunities to learn about biomes, invasive species, or migratory paths. The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary facilitates the maintenance of a dominant Minnesota paradigm: it echoes larger values of connecting people to the environment, people to places, and places to places through the trail networks. None of these are exactly new paradigms in the city or in Minnesota. Some of these values were already well established, even the dominant paradigms (trails and outdoor recreation). This is a value evident throughout Minnesota but is reinforced by the development here. Others have grown in the last thirty years, but were further strengthened here.

The site facilitates valuing the past and for historic preservation both inside its boundaries and nearby places. The development of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary not only accomplished the cleanup of the site after years of neglect, but its existence sustains the revitalization. No one dumps garbage there anymore and there is little fear of crime or

chance of stumbling upon a homeless encampment. There is a respect for the site as a place for the community and there are more “eyes on the street” as the site is used heavily all day and all year (and perhaps increased patrols as well). Perceptions of crime and littering that come along with trails often disappear once the trail is on the ground; those are more likely to be seen in an unused, undeveloped landscape than a completed trail project. These are outcomes that would have not happened without the trail and sanctuary’s development. Another outcome that is planned is the restoration and reuse of the Standard Oil Building adjacent to the sanctuary. Interest in preserving and reusing that building would certainly not have existed had the sanctuary not been completed.

### **Landscape that brings people and ideas together**

The ceremony held at the sanctuary’s opening showed how this site is a place where people and ideas are reconciled. Anne Ketz, the historical consultant who did the Section 106 review, recounted it in this way:

The official opening ceremony for the sanctuary was a landmark event, with participation from community partners, politicians and many Native people. Prayers and speeches were made, drummers played, and there was a tangible sense of a collective vision and desire for a rebirth of this land and a sharing of its important cultural and ecological history (2006: 3).

Here the mediation is both literal and figurative. The trail helped to accomplish the literal bringing together of disparate interests – Dakota tribal representatives, St. Paul neighbors, politicians, and planners – at one place and time to celebrate the common ground of the opening of the Sanctuary. It is figurative in that it furthers understanding and communication between the local Native American cultures and the cultures of other local residents – both long term resident cultures and relative newcomers like



Lao/Hmong immigrants. Many of the young interns who work at the site are Southeast Asian youth from the nearby neighborhoods.

The site provides a spatial context for mediation between the Dakota people and the rest of the public. The restoration of the land and ecosystem to native species is a part of healing for past wrongs against land and people. Vento Sanctuary reconciles the contentious European settlement story with the Native American sense of belonging to this place through the steering committee's sensitive development and interpretation. The planners chose to step very carefully and respect the story. They didn't just start with Anglo settlement, and they chose not to tell the story of the brewery in great detail, the brewery story must be reconciled with the story of how the European settlers (and their alcohol) impacted the Native Americans. This process is a long way from conclusion and will continue to be worked out over many years.

Another way that the Vento Sanctuary mediates is around the dual theme of "nature/history" so prominent in the vision for the site. Nature is mediated (communicated, explained, interpreted, connected) to the site's visitors and neighbors. These people may have little understanding of the ecology of the place, the importance of the river, the habitats the site provides, and how natural landscapes can be restored after degradation. Tied to the way the site provides a context for mediating ecology to visitors is the way that the site communicates the stories of the past to the public. One of the core foci of the steering committee is to tell the history of the site and through it the history of the city, the state, and the region.

The Vento Sanctuary, along with other urban natural areas in the Twin Cities, serves the purpose of connecting people to the land and the stories tied to it. Especially for urban youth who may not have any generational ties to the place, places such as Vento provide a way for people to find meaning in their city not just in their homes, streets, or relationships but in the stories both natural and cultural.

### **Landscape that physically manifests values from the community and beyond**

The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary manifests many of the values traditionally associated with the Twin Cities and the state of Minnesota and its residents: values placed upon outdoor recreation, natural resources, parks and trails, alternative transportation, the Mississippi River, education and families, Native American culture, and history. Each of these stories plays out in the place of the nature sanctuary. The idea of discourses materialized in the landscape (Schein1997) correlates with this dissertation's theme of "values in place": the values of those who had roles in shaping the place are evident and physically manifested in that place.

### **Outdoor values: trails/public greenspace, natural resources, the river, conservation**

The Vento Sanctuary would not exist without advocacy from individuals and groups who support the development and conservation of natural resources and open space. This support ranged from participation on steering committees to committing thousands of dollars in funding and ongoing maintenance. The sanctuary itself is a material expression of these discourses and is a testament of the strong values for these things.

Minnesota has a long-established record of developing rail trails (some of the first were legislatively authorized in the late 1960s) and the statistics point to this history. The

state is second only to Michigan in number of miles of rail trails with 2,327 miles (RTC 2010). One place from which much financial, planning, vision, and leadership support comes is the state, primarily the state Department of Natural Resources. The DNR manages Minnesota's state trails (most are rail trails); most of these trails are dozens of miles long and some are over one hundred miles. Also in Minnesota is a network of over 21,000 miles of seasonal snowmobile trails. Many of these trails use roadway ditches and the margins of farm fields where signage is the only permanent infrastructure but other trails have dedicated rights of way. A grant-in-aid program funds local volunteer efforts to maintain these trails. It was a difficult and multi-year endeavor to acquire and develop the Vento Sanctuary, but it was possible because of the infrastructure of support and expectations that both the public and state and local leadership has for trails and parks in Minnesota. Trails and other outdoor recreation amenities in Minnesota serve as normative landscapes, places that both reflect and perpetuate the values underlying them (Schein 2003).



Figure 7.7: Trails that connect Vento Sanctuary to nearby parks and regional trails. Remnants of abandoned railroad bridge infrastructure visible on the right with the Trout Brook canal under the bridge (natural stream that was confined to canal).

The Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment, a 0.38 percent sales tax increase approved by voters in 2008 to fund natural resources, water quality, and historic/cultural resources, is another example of how this discourse of trail/park support is manifest<sup>31</sup>. The state is still in the process of planning for how the proceeds will be allocated, but its existence is telling of the degree to which Minnesotans value natural and

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<sup>31</sup> The question that was on the 2008 General Election ballot stated: "Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to dedicate funding to protect our drinking water sources; to protect, enhance, and restore our wetlands, prairies, forests, and fish, game, and wildlife habitat; to preserve our arts and cultural heritage; to support our parks and trails; and to protect, enhance, and restore our lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater by increasing the sales and use tax rate beginning July 1, 2009, by three-eighths of one percent on taxable sales until the year 2034?"

cultural resources. There is little material evidence of this particular funding stream on the landscape yet because it is so new. The amendment includes four separate funds: the Outdoor Heritage Fund (33 percent of tax proceeds), the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund (33 percent of tax proceeds), the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund (14.25 percent of tax proceeds), and the Clean Water Fund (19.75 percent of tax proceeds). So far the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund has begun to allocate money to applicants, but the other funds are still in the planning stages. Nina Archabal, director of the Minnesota Historical Society and State Historic Preservation Officer spoke of the way this amendment represented the “basic values of Minnesotans” in its focus on clean water, parks and trails, and the arts and that its successful adoption “shows the true heart of Minnesotans” (Archabal 2009).

As part of the planning process for the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, in partnership with the non-profit Citizens League, conducted seventeen community workshops around the state during the spring of 2010. The purpose of these workshops was to learn about the public’s “vision and values for Minnesota parks and trails” and to use that input as the foundation for writing the twenty-five-year long range plan for how to spend the revenue from the Legacy Fund (MNDNR/Citizens League 6/15/10). Most of these workshops around the state attracted well over fifty participants; some had over ninety. The one I attended in Minneapolis had nearly seventy people in attendance. Participants were a decidedly self-selected group of strong park and trail advocates, many of whom work for various state, local, or non-profit agencies active in the world of trails and parks. At tables of six to eight participants plus a facilitator, we discussed things such as what are the primary benefits of outdoor recreation, what the funding priorities should be, how to increase participation in outdoor

recreation, how to deal with budget challenges, and what our vision for Minnesota's parks and trails is for the next twenty-five years. Then we registered our individual votes via wireless key pads for instant views of the opinions of the whole group. This workshop reinforced the way that trails and parks are an expected and even demanded public good. One participant said "people expect police protection, and fire protection in their communities but parks really drive a community and drive people to want to stay in a community." A strong indication of the unrepresentative group assembled at the workshop (aside from the fact it was overwhelmingly white, middle aged, and male) was the way the group voted on how to deal with budget challenges: 51 percent agreed that raising taxes was an acceptable solution, by far the largest number of any of the ideas (the next most popular idea was sharing management with local agencies with 35 percent). The public as a whole would probably not be so supportive of increased taxes, but they did vote to institute the Legacy Fund in the first place. Many states across the nation are closing parks, cutting hours, cutting programming and staff, even selling property but Minnesota is one of the only places that is actively planning for future development and expansion instead of retrenchment.

How does the public engage with the values for natural resources and open space?

They come to the Vento Sanctuary to bird watch, or to see the restored and growing ecosystems. Some visit to paint or photograph at the site. They participate as volunteers at the site doing cleanup or restoration work. Others participate in the internships through the Youth Conservation Corps. Some engage more passively with these values through reading the interpretive signs or by simply walking or biking through the sanctuary or even appreciating its presence without using the site at all.

## **History and historic preservation**

History was always present in the process of building a vision for the site through planning and development. There are values for the stories of the place, known and unknown, visible and invisible. A weedy, trashy, mess became evidence of a significant railroad story. A roughly barricaded hole in the bluff became known as a site of considerable symbolic importance to generations of Native American people. Listening to and validating Native voices is encouraged here. The compelling histories told through the site were important motivators to committee members, funders, and the public. The need to tell these stories provided impetus to its completion; it was not just another bike trail (though it still would have been built probably even if that was the case).

These values for history manifest at the site through the attention to the different layers of history present there: the Native American story of Wakan Tipi and nearby settlements, the early settler story of the Northstar Brewery and St. Paul's first industries, and the story of the railroads that altered and expanded the site as an important rail yard. The negotiation process by the steering committee with the disparate interests represented there testifies to the values for history and preservation. There was a desire on the committee's (and the city's) part to preserve elements of all of these periods of significance and not tell one story at the expense of another. Remnants of the concrete railroad maintenance pads were left in place as a visual clue to the industrial past. Corners of the brewery foundation were left exposed to show evidence of its location (along with the brewery cave, a natural cave expanded for use in the beer making process). Wakan Tipi's entrance is still carefully (if not aesthetically) protected, even though much of the cave was destroyed during the railroad expansions at the site.

How does the public engage with the values for history or historic preservation at the Vento Sanctuary? Most engagement is passive, through observation, by exploring and viewing the site, and by reading the interpretive signs. Visitors can see remnants of the brewery foundations and peer into the caves used by the brewery. They can see the closed entrance to Wakan Tipi. They can walk along the concrete slabs left from the railroad maintenance facility. Some special events and tours at the site provide guided tours and educational opportunities. In the future, visitors to the site might be able to more actively experience the history of the site through the restoration of the former industrial building into an interpretive center.

### **Alternative transportation**

There is much debate on the merits of non-personal automobile transportation projects (or more precisely, the public financing of such projects), even in Minnesota where support for trails and public transport are quite strong. But trails like this one continue to be built around the state. The Vento site served as a missing link in an already extensive regional trail network. It connected several local trails and made it possible to travel from downtown St. Paul to Duluth entirely on paved off-road trails. Once a bridge is built over the active rail line, the site will connect to trails farther to the south.

Even in Minnesota's harsh winter climate, Minneapolis is near the top in numbers of bicycle commuters<sup>32</sup> (second only to Portland, OR). Much of this figure is because of an extensive network of off-road trails and on-road bicycle lanes in addition to seamless connections to public transportation (all buses and light rail trains have bike racks).

Turning parkland into pieces of a larger network and not just unconnected destination

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<sup>32</sup> Portland had 5.96 percent of commuters traveling by bike; Minneapolis had 4.27 percent (2008 American Community Survey data, refers only to commuting to work and not leisure trips).



pieces is a key goal of regional park and trail advocates (and lay people as evidenced in Parks and Trails Legacy Fund workshops – especially from communities with trails lacking links). In addition, a key part of trail success is building trails that connect places where people live to places they want and need to go. The Vento site does this well as it connects Lowertown St. Paul with its Farmers’ Market, condos, entertainment, and offices to neighborhoods on the Eastside and beyond. The public engages with the values for alternative transportation through their feet and their bicycles by using the trails through the site for recreation and commuting.

### **Native American History**

The site serves to mediate between Native American culture and history and white European culture and history but it also displays physical manifestations of Native American discourses and of the communications and connections between Native and White cultures in Minnesota today. In many ways, the relationship between Native American groups and Euro-American groups in Minnesota is still healing from generations of difficulties. Conflicts still arise over interpretations of treaty rights, the influence of now-wealthy tribes with successful urban casinos, residual pain from years of forced relocation to reservations, and the memory of the 1862 Dakota Conflict with white settlers. In the past ten years, several sites in the Twin Cities metro area have been subject to public debate over use and interpretation in the realm of Native American history and claims to significance. The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary was developed into public parkland in the midst of these conflicts and was shaped by the planners’ desire to do their best to incorporate Native American groups in the planning process, to respect the sacred Wakan Tipi site, and to develop and interpret that area according to their

wishes. The steering committee consulted the cultural resources director from a metro Dakota band during the planning process and continues to consult with tribal representatives from a variety of local native groups.



Figure 7.8: Jim Rice speaks with a group of visitors to the Vento Sanctuary about Native American traditions and the history of the site. The cottonwood tree in the foreground is the one he planted at his marriage ceremony.

The history of the Native American presence on the site is sort of a parallel trajectory to the site's history: it is a story of significance, subjugation, devaluation, forgetting, then rediscovery, revaluing, and honor once again in the same way the site went through a cycle of being valued, devalued, and revalued. The presence of Native American representatives at the opening ceremonies was a powerful statement, but the smaller clues on the landscape are even more powerful. One of these is the cottonwood tree planted by the pond outside of Wakan Tipi. Most current uses of the site by tribal groups leave no evidence on the landscape, but this tree, planted by Jim Rice and his wife

at their wedding ceremony on the site, testifies to the site's importance to both them personally and to the significance of the site within Native American culture. The tree itself is unmarked and unassuming and I am fortunate to have learned its story from Jim.

### **Broader discourses materialized through local landscape**

In what way does the trail landscape mediate national agendas or discourses to the public in the St. Paul/Minneapolis metro area? As discussed above, Minnesota enjoys a high level of support for parks and trails at many levels from citizens to local and state government organizations. This support is then leveraged to bring in federal money and support for trails and recreation.

The Bruce Vento nature Sanctuary is a local, physical manifestation of the larger discourse and value for preservation of abandoned railroad corridors as advocated by organizations like the Rails to Trails Conservancy, though it does not appear that the RTC had any direct involvement in Vento's development. Indirectly, the Vento site exists because of the advocacy of the RTC for programs and legislation like railbanking and Transportation Enhancement funds. More than \$1 million came from the TE program to fund the development of the Vento Sanctuary and connecting trails.

Unlike Kentucky, historic preservation is not at such a central position in the eyes of the governor or state funding streams. Just in the past year after eleven years of trying did the state pass a historic preservation tax credit program. Very little Transportation Enhancement funding was used for historic preservation-related projects over the years. State TE coordinators speculated that Minnesotans have a different sense of history in some ways. They thought that perhaps because our settlement history is so recent, our ideas about what is "historic" are different. In addition, they cited the power of inertia in

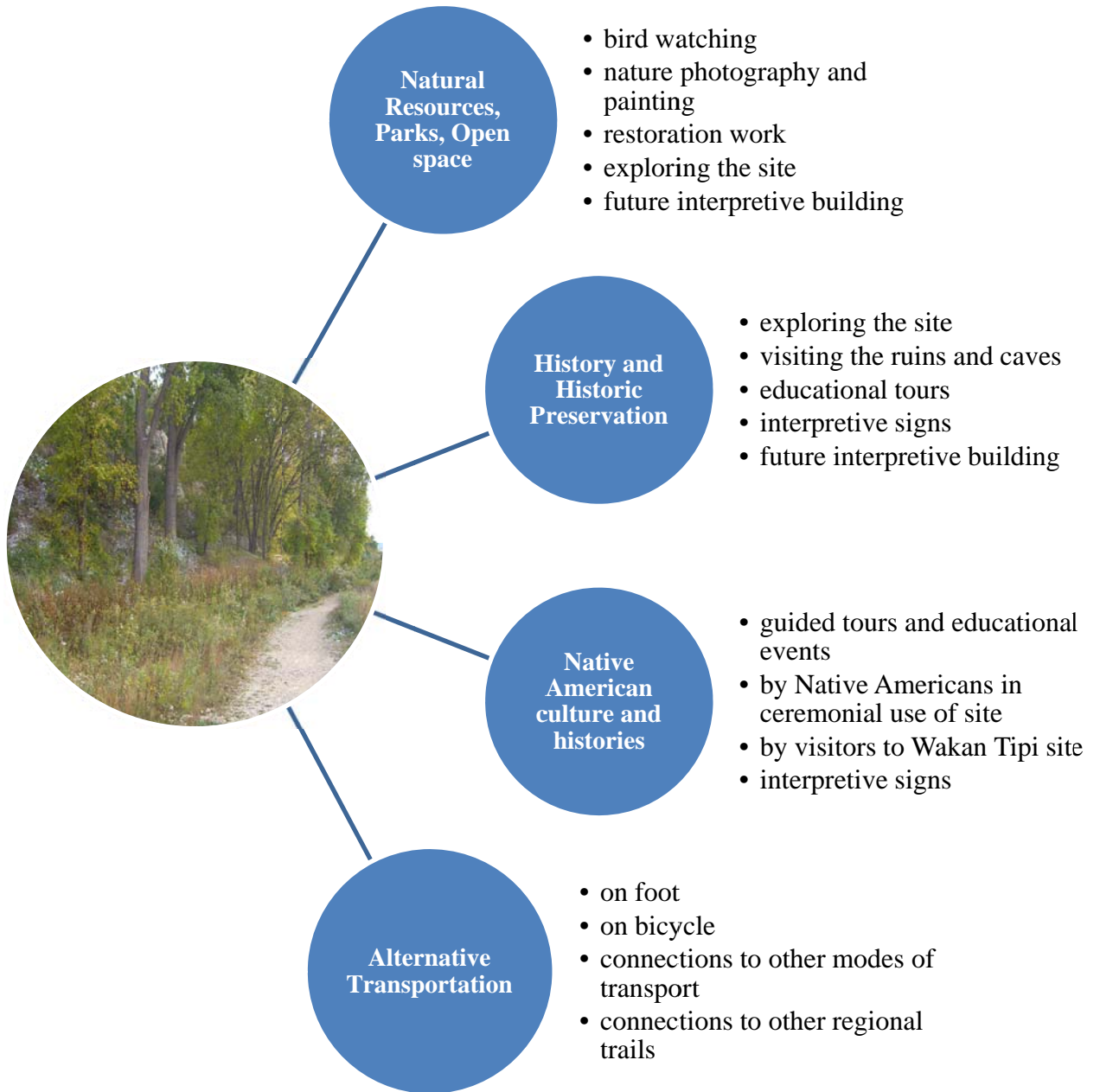
transportation versus preservation projects – there is such a long legacy of project success with trail projects that officials are reluctant to try something too far away (Chambers and Anderson 2005). This is not to say that the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office is not active around the state or that historic preservation as a whole is not supported. It is just to say that there is a different level of support and money available for preservation versus trails, especially in Transportation Enhancement funding. It is telling that this project received TE funds under category one: pedestrian and bicycle facilities and not under one of the categories that relate to historic preservation.

Behind the scenes, but vital to the development of the Vento Sanctuary, was the support of local and national groups that advocate for natural resource preservation. Two major players at the Vento site were the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The TPL was instrumental in acquiring the property from the railroad; they supplied an attorney who assisted with the negotiations. The TPL also helped create a plan for environmental remediation and the new design for the site. They also helped obtain liability insurance for the site while it was under development (TPL 2006). While there is no distinct imprint of the involvement of Trust for Public Land within the Vento site, the very presence of the developed park and trails is testament to their influence. The DNR was active in securing funding and support for the development of the Vento Sanctuary. The DNR Metro Greenways Program assisted with restoring the native ecosystems to the site. In addition, the DNR is active in trails and greenways advocacy around the state and applied their extensive experience and support to the project.

The Vento site is a place that normalizes a dominant paradigm for trails and outdoor recreation in Minnesota, but that doesn't mean it was without conflict or negotiation in its development. Almost as prominent as its embracing of dominant ideas was the number of potential conflicts: between commercial and recreational uses, between different types of park uses, between those who would highlight the historic versus the ecological, between the different histories represented there. But planners have managed to accommodate these conflicts and even hope in the future to highlight them (especially the conflicting histories of white settlers and Native Americans). A lesson from this case is the power of listening to community values in a place and designing the project based on those values.

# Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary

## Values in Place and ways the public engages with them



In this chapter we explored the ways in which landscapes can facilitate ideas and values, the ways they can mediate between people and ideas, and the ways that discourses are realized as physical expressions in place. It is useful to remember why this endeavor is important. We explore values in places because people matter; their stories matter, and knowing them more deeply can lead to the development of places that resonate more with a community, that fully embrace what communities most value.

The three case studies explored in this research each do the same thing and different things. They each express what matters to the people who had a role in creating them. In Muhlenberg County the trail became a new paradigm in the community: it changed the way people valued the railroad corridor as it became a valuable community space for recreation and wellness. In Oldham County the greenway network is envisioned as a way to protect a paradigm held dear (for a variety of reasons): that of rural character and vistas. The trails help to both preserve the landscape and also, paradoxically, attract amenity-seeking suburban dwellers to the place. In Minnesota at the Vento Sanctuary the trail and park extended, maintained, and helped to normalize the dominant trails paradigm already supported and expected in the region. In the following concluding remarks, we will revisit some of the major themes of this dissertation, address the contributions it makes within and outside academia, and explore some possible future directions for research.

## Chapter 8 : Conclusion



Figure 8.1: Abandoned rail line near Moorman, KY



Figure 8.2: Completed rail trail in Uniontown, KY

This dissertation explored the connections between values and place and why values matter in trail and historic preservation projects. The central questions addressed through the three rail trail case studies were how does a landscape become valued, devalued, and/or revalued through time? And how do historic values intersect with economic, social, political, and other values as these relate to landscape preservation?



One of the foundational assertions of this dissertation is that rails to trails projects are inherently acts of historic preservation. By choosing to leave a former rail corridor intact and reusing it for a new transportation use, the integrity and “feel” of the place as a corridor is preserved and many of the auxiliary pieces of the railroad landscape are preserved as a result such as bridges, depots, culverts, and signals. Also, the development of a trail often leads to positive economic impacts on the communities it passes through, an echo of the original effect of the rail line. This reinvestment often translates to preservation of other historic fabric in trail towns. Both trail advocates and preservation advocates readily recognize the inherent common ground between the two interests but do not directly promote trail development as historic preservation. The Rails to Trails Conservancy refers to the National Trust for Historic Preservation as “good friends” (RTC 2010a) and the National Trust refers to the RTC as “close collaborators” (NTHP 2010b). Rail trails are not outlier examples of historic preservation projects; they are squarely in the middle of what preservation wishes to accomplish today: the preservation of communities and cultural landscapes that continue to be used by the communities in which they are located and not just individual, disconnected buildings apart from everyday life.

Following that assertion, the examination of rail trails as a cultural landscape in geographic research is also a new endeavor. There is much precedent for exploring ordinary landscapes in geographic research (Jackson 1980, Meinig 1979, Groth and Bressi 1979, among others) and many aspects of railroad transportation have received attention in geography (Vance 1995, Borchert 1987). Historic preservation has also been well studied (Page and Mason 2004, Stipe 2003, Murtagh 2006), but examining rail trails

as a cultural landscape and as an act of historic preservation is a new line of inquiry bridging disciplines.

The primary theme running throughout the entire dissertation was that of “values in place,” the idea that values held by communities and individuals are manifest in and through the places that they create, use, and care about. The purpose of the dissertation was to examine how we learn about these values, why it matters to learn about them, what to do with the information once we learn it, and who can benefit from learning more about communities’ “values in place.”

The Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary provided an example of the way community values for a place changed dramatically over the years from sacred Native American gathering place, to important industrial area, to neglected and vandalized “no man’s land,” to parkland with educational, recreational, transportation, historical, and ecological values. The Muhlenberg County Rail Trail told a story of a community that did not know that it would value a trail so highly until it was built in spite of a lack of community support. The trail is now one of the central community gathering places, tourist attractions, and points of pride in the county. In Oldham County, we saw not so much how community sentiment towards trails changed over time, but how changing community values supported the development of a trail as an expression of those values.

### **Bridging disciplines**

This idea of values in place unifies ideas from many different traditions and areas of professional practice including humanistic and critical geographical traditions, transportation planning, and historic preservation. This research contributed to bridging these three disciplines that otherwise have minimal interaction. There has certainly been

much recent conversation in historic preservation that ties in ideas from cultural geography, but there are still many more opportunities to enrich practice there and in trails planning with insights on values in place.

Each of these areas has some degree of focus on finding out what people believe is significant or valuable about places, though each has different purposes in mind. Values-based (or values-centered) preservation is the best fit for a theory/method that encompasses what is important to each of these different areas. Values-based preservation is a way of describing how historic preservation practice can assess community values relating to places and incorporate those values in every step of the planning process as historic places are defined, restored, redeveloped, and used. A values-centered approach is at the core of the effort to bring together historic preservation and geographical practice and research. This dissertation contributes to the conversation between these interests by serving as a translation between the two, who often speak of similar issues in similar ways. Randall Mason (2007) put this approach at the core of preservation practice when he said,

“The future of the field of historic preservation depends on ability to make arguments for saving places on many different values. The key job of preservation is to reconcile different appraisals of value (for example economic, cultural, social, or historic)”.

Values-based preservation can be extended to enterprises other than preservation such as trails and parks or transportation planning (indeed, it exists in these realms under a variety of different titles). Through the case studies in this dissertation we have learned the ways that a values-focused method can be effective and fruitful. A values-based

approach in preservation and trails is also an effective way to make connections between applied and theoretical interests.

A critical humanistic geographical tradition provided a setting for this research. The legacy of humanistic geography include an emphasis on human experience in place (places matter because people matter) and the contributions of critical human geography in the foundations of this research included sensitivity to systems of power and influence beyond the individual and beyond the local and how those things interact with individual experiences in place.

### **Schein's framework**

Schein's (2009) "framework for interpreting ordinary landscapes" has been a useful approach for laying out place stories, exploring the meanings and values that people and communities have attached to those places, and analyzing ways that the places facilitate, mediate, and physically materialize ideas and values. His framework is not just an academic or theoretical exercise. It is approachable and broadly applicable to virtually any place.

This dissertation expanded Schein's model in new ways by weaving through it humanistic concerns in place-based research. Schein's model focuses on "landscape as a part of broader social and political and economic and cultural discourses that are at once disciplinary through the landscape's place as a tangible visible scene/seen, even as those discourses are open to challenge in and through the landscape itself" (Schein 2009: 398). I have expanded the framework by considering people's connections to and through landscapes, why those matter, and what can be done with that knowledge. The model is enriched and carried in new directions when the researcher interacts with people who

value the landscape in question. Methods including participant observation, interviews, surveys, and focus groups bring the investigation of community values and meanings out of the archive to the very people creating and using the place.

### **Why do values in place matter?**

It was important to step back in this research and ask two questions: why is geographic research concerned with values in place? and who is this for? The pursuit of understanding of places and the people and cultures who create and find meaning in them is a worthy one because that understanding can be used for much good, not just as an academic exercise. Places matter because people matter, and because people matter, making places that resonate with people, that people love and connect with, matters. Knowing the communities' values and senses of place and history help those involved with making places (such as planners) to make better ones. Within geography, place, along with space, has been called the core of geographic study (Tuan 1977, Adams, et. al 2001). In the humanistic tradition, the meaning and experience of places is a central focus. The combination of values and place as a locus of study is important because place is not merely "where things happen" but part of why social processes happen the way they do. It is a different pursuit than the more literary purposes of many regional writers who seek to capture the essence of a place in words or explore the implications of a place's meaning, or the power of place to shape identity, though not entirely separate from pursuits like those.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Two literary anthologies have been a continual inspiration for my work as a geographer since undergraduate days: *Imagining Home: Writing from the Midwest* and *Inheriting the Land: Contemporary Voices from the Midwest* ed. by Mark Vinz and Thom Tamaro. Another Minnesota example is *The Heart Can Be Filled Anywhere on Earth* by Bill Holm. *Home and Beyond: A Collection of Kentucky Short Stories* ed. by Morris Allen Grubbs is a good representative of the Kentucky version of this genre.

### **Who is this for?**

It was important for me to be able to answer the question “who is this for?” with someone other than myself. This research, in the way it brings together often disparate camps of theory and method, is for anyone who is involved in making places: trails advocates, historic preservation advocates, community members interested in livable communities, as well as academics in geography, planning, or preservation. Some avenues to share this work with others in trails and historic preservation include presentations at conferences, articles in professional publications, participation on citizen panels and, potentially, advisory boards for individual projects, and guest lectures in historic preservation university courses.

### **Future directions**

This project works towards connecting various disciplines around the common ground of exploring values in places and towards recognizing how values matter not just in theory, but in the real places, hearts, and lives of real people. Beyond adding to the broader collection of geographical knowledge, the goal of this work is to assist and promote, in some small way, greater public participation in planning, visioning, and interpreting plus maintaining great recreational and/or historical places in our communities. I think there are very real opportunities for applying Schein’s framework in everyday planning practice in the analysis of what communities value about places. Public input is growing in importance and commonly plays at least some role in project development, as seen in the three case studies and in background information on transportation and historic preservation planning. Planners and communities, however, still strive for greater public inclusion and this four part framework could be applied (perhaps in modified form) to a variety of projects. A natural next step would be to apply

this framework to an actual trail or historic preservation project from start to finish. In each of these case studies, I was a mere observer and had no role in deciding methodology for obtaining public input or determining community values. In addition, I was examining the projects retrospectively through the lens of Schein's model; a very different experience than actively applying it from the start.

One possible way to implement this framework in the planning for a real project would be to incorporate this exercise into the community service learning portion of a cultural geography course. I've used examples of rail trails to teach about transportation and urban morphology and I've used historic preservation case studies to teach about layers of urban history and meaning in familiar places. Through established community service learning arrangements, it would be quite straightforward to partner a class with a community group, public agency, or consulting firm to provide assistance with a trail or preservation project in which we could help employ aspects of Schein's framework to learn about the meanings and values the community holds for that place. In essence, students could act as "consultants" to help facilitate this methodology through interviews, community meetings, and researching archival materials in cooperation with the project leads.

In a broader view, this study opened questions for how else one might learn more about the interactions between discourses and landscapes through the examination of values held by individuals attached to places. Future studies could rely more heavily on interviews with individual community members in order to explore how values shift over time and interact with landscape changes. Of particular interest would be studies of rail

trail or other historic landscapes where people with memories of, and attachment to the place, span its history and uses before and after restoration or reuse.

I argue that historic preservation, trails, and other endeavors around sustainable development, smart growth, and active living will become preeminently important in places around the U.S. as economic realities change and as people become more aware of the benefits of these types of development in terms of jobs, the environment, health and wellness, livable communities, and historic preservation. Keith Laughlin, president of Rails to Trails Conservancy characterized the rails to trails movement as “at a tipping point” of support (2004). Preservation advocates speak of their movement in the same way. If this is in fact the case, it will be important to conduct more research into the implications of these types of development in many realms: economic, urban form, community values and meanings, health, transportation, etc. Geographic research is at the center of these concerns and is well positioned to make important contributions there.



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