SHEEP COUNTRY IN THREE WESTERN AMERICAN LOCALITIES: PLACE

IDENTITY, LANDSCAPE, COMMUNITY, AND FAMILY

by

Linnea Christiana Sando

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of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Earth Sciences

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DEDICATION

For my three favorite boys – Roy, Oliver, and Jasper.

With all my love,
L
Several people deserve to be acknowledged, for without their help and guidance, this work would not have been possible. First, thank you to my committee members: Dr. William Wyckoff (chair), Dr. Mary Murphy, Dale Martin, and Dr. Julia Haggerty. Thank you for the interest, questions, input, and support you have provided from the beginning. I am especially grateful to my advisor, Dr. Wyckoff, who has shown continual wisdom, guidance, patience, and encouragement over the past years. You have demonstrated by example how to be an excellent geographer, an enthusiastic scholar, and a most generous mentor. Thank you to the many people in Montana, Nevada, and Oregon who spent time with me and shared their stories. I would like to specifically thank Kevin and Shirley Halverson, Pete and Rama Paris, and Patricia Heathman for welcoming me into their homes on countless occasions and for their willingness to talk for hours with me. Thank you to Rita Esp and Meg Glaser for their assistance in the archives. I am also especially grateful for my friends and family who have shown me incredible support and sacrificed their time to help me complete this project. Thank you to Lee, Steve, Annie, Tristen, and Sharilyn for all the hours you watched Oliver and Jasper. Thank you to my mom for showing and teaching me persistence, and to my dad who instilled in me a love of wonder and eagerness to find the significance in all places. Thank you to Dr. Charles “Fritz” Gritzner for your enthusiasm for Geography, your friendship, and your years of mentorship. Finally, and most notably, thank you, Roy. Thank you for your patience, calmness, big-picture mindset, and your never-ending support.
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Sheep ranching in the American West is a vanishing way of life, but one that has for generations shaped many of the region’s communities and their cultural landscapes. This research explores how powerful and enduring place identities associated with sheep ranching and the wool industry have transformed communities in Sweet Grass County, Montana, Elko County, Nevada and Umatilla County, Oregon. To assess the evolving roles sheep ranching and the wool industry have played in cultivating place identity, I used interviews and conversations, “stories,” landscape observation and analysis, an analysis of past and contemporary creative endeavors, and archival works, such as government documents, local histories, newspaper articles, and promotional literature and imagery. I also explored the concept of place identity from varied perspectives, including from a community standpoint and a more in-depth family perspective. The sheep and wool industries did not unfold and impact the places and people in identical ways. Factors including the physical environment, local economies, key players and image makers, cultural backgrounds, and defining institutions of communities all played a role in shaping place identities. This research also shows the myriad ways communities and their residents incorporate the heritage of raising sheep into their daily lives, such as through festivals, community events, the sharing of social memories, and through creative works. The urban and rural landscapes in each case study also reflect the wool and sheep legacies, but this legacy is displayed differently based on distinctive environmental settings and unique settlement histories. By assessing the concept of place identity from varied perspectives and varied sources in three different localities, this dissertation provides a meaningful methodology for examining the ways place identities are created, nurtured, and reflected at multiple scales and in a diversity of communities.
CHAPTER 1 – EXPLORING SHEEP COUNTRY IN THE AMERICAN WEST

I catch a slight whiff of sheep, so I must be on the right track. I look down, see sheep droppings, and continue along the path. I’m high in northeast Nevada’s Jarbidge Mountains. Soon, the faint sound of baa-ing drifts through the air, and I have found their summer pastures. The lone white tent, surrounded by miles and miles of green grass, aspen groves, and mountains, comes into view. When I reach a high point, I look down and see the subtle shifting of the ground as lambs and ewes roam about in small flocks. After a minute, there is commotion near a draw as large bunches of sheep trot out of the trees with a dog and a lone Peruvian herder not far behind. It is mid-morning, time to gather the flocks together to rest during the heat of the July day.

This once common encounter is now increasingly rare across the American West. What still remains within the region, however, are memories of a sheep ranching heritage and strong place identities associated with that heritage. These place identities are represented in the surrounding landscape and includes historic buildings, murals, cemeteries, monuments, and remnants of former sheep camps. Local museums and newspapers, creative works such as films and music, and a community’s social memories are other ways in which place identity is manifest. This dissertation explores how powerful and enduring place identities associated with sheep have transformed communities in Sweet Grass County, Montana, Elko County, Nevada and Umatilla County, Oregon (Figure 1-1).
Figure 1-1. Dissertation case studies. Map by author.
Key Questions and Significance of Research

1. How has the sheep ranching industry shaped the place identities and landscapes of three western American localities – Sweet Grass County, Montana, Elko County, Nevada, and Umatilla County, Oregon?

2. What are some of the different ways in which we can reconstruct these evolving place identities and landscape features?

3. How and why do these locations differ or parallel one another?

Sheep ranching is an important but underappreciated part of the story of western American settlement. While dozens of studies explore cattle ranching and cowboy culture, sheep ranching narratives have received less attention despite the industry’s role in shaping large portions of the western landscape. This research adds to the historical geography of western ranching and emphasizes the contribution of the sheep industry to that story.

This research is also important because it chronicles a vanishing way of life in the American West. It is an overlooked narrative that needed further exploration. Barry Lopez (1989, 225) lamented that “year by year, the number of people with firsthand experience in the land dwindles.” The firsthand experience is also the loss of “personal and local knowledge” from which Lopez says “real geography is derived” and “on which country must ultimately stand.” This study was timely in that I was still able to listen to the stories and experiences of herders, ranchers, shearers, mill workers, and others who have been central in the creation of the current character of each place. These unseen
components of the landscape also still exist for exploration, and they include people’s memories and experiences – the so-called invisible landscape.

This research also adds to the geographical literature on place identity. Geographers have explored place identity from the perspective of mining communities (Marsh 1987; Ryden 1993; Robertson 2006; Wheeler 2014), urban neighborhoods (Hareven and Langenbach 198; Hayden 1995), and small, rural communities (De Bres and Davis 2001; Schnell 2003). This study builds on their approaches and suggests how sheep raising has also strongly influenced the identity of people and place. Further, place identities are created, nurtured, and reflected in different ways. My research examines a wide variety of source material such as landscapes, social memories, heritage, artistic endeavors, various archival sources, promotional materials, and local newspaper stories. Through these varied sources, I was able to assess many of the different ways in which place identity is created. Selecting three separate case studies also allowed me to compare and contrast how these identities might vary. Hopefully, my approach and methodology can be used as a template for examining place identity in other settings.

Finally, my research contributes to the literature on geographies of labor and gender in the American West. Raising sheep is a labor-intensive activity that revolves around annual work cycles of wintering, shearing, lambing, herding, and trailing. Even after the sheep are shorn, and the wool is scoured and sent to a mill, the stories of labor continue. Labor, sheep, and wool cannot be separated. Part of the narrative includes the stories of the shearing “gangs,” the local and immigrant herders and camp tenders, the people working with the wool, and the role of both men and women in the sheep and
woolen industries. Many of these stories have been silenced, whether intentionally or not. By sharing the stories of labor and their associated landscapes, as well as the gender roles involved in raising sheep and working in a woolen mill, this study adds to the literature of gender and labor geography in the American West.

Exploring Place Identity: Methods and Sources

How does one “measure” place identity? How do you know if there’s an identity with a particular way of life in a place and among individuals living in the place or collectively as a community? Place identity is complex and exploring diverse perspectives and sources allows for a broader understanding of place identity.

One of the strengths of my research methodology was to assess the concept of place identity from varied perspectives. For each case study, I explore how an enduring place identity is created, nurtured, and reflected at different scales that include both communities and families. The community’s role provides a larger-scale perspective on how a group of people has been shaped by and also contributed to shaping a place identity associated with the sheep and wool industries. At a more intimate scale, the family perspective allows for an in-depth exploration of how individuals and families share and pass on memories, stories, and experiences, as well as the ways they see, shape, and are shaped by the local landscape.

Other scholars have also explored place identities from different scales and perspectives. David Robertson (2006) studied three different mining communities, utilizing family and individual experiences as well as assessing how the community was
perceived by residents and outsiders. Michèle Dominy (2001) focused on families in her study of sheep farming in New Zealand’s high country and showed the value of understanding families’ connections to the land and their stories in the formation of place identity. Part of the community perspective involves collective memories, or common, shared stories about the place. Scholars have shown the value of examining place identity from the community perspective by exploring how collective memories of communities are manifest in different ways (Ryden 1993; Robertson 2006; Wheeler 2014).

In Sweet Grass County and Elko County, I found a multi-generational sheep ranching family in each site willing to spend days with me, take me on trips through their local landscape, and share their stories with me. Both families are well-known in their community, and residents frequently mentioned their names to me as valuable people to interview. As Kent Ryden (1993) found in his study of individuals and families in an Idaho mining community, family stories are valuable in understanding a place as they become part of family traditions. For the Pendleton Woolen Mills case study, a former employee whose family also worked at the mill provided similar insight into how the mill has shaped a particular family and their lives in northeastern Oregon.

I also examined sources that emphasized a broader community scale of shared place identity in each setting. For the community perspective in Sweet Grass County and Elko County, the seasonal cycle of sheep work, such as shearing, lambing, docking, herding, and shipping, was a considerable component as the various activities bound the community together and created shared experiences. As Peirce Lewis (1979b, 41) also found, communities with a strong sense of place all “have a sense of shared experiences.”
For each case study, the community perspective also included an examination of community events and celebrations connected to a sheep ranching or a woolen mill heritage. I also explored how key community institutions, such as the local newspaper, museums, and cultural centers, shaped shared memories about sheep ranching or the wool business. Utilizing different scales and perspectives allowed me to explore the varied ways people relate to their sheep and wool heritage. For a place identity to persist, a place needs both individual and collective stories, experiences, and memories.

Varied sources were used to explore place identity. To understand places, their meanings, and how they influence each other, experts in the field suggest “engaging with people directly and repeatedly, by delving in the historical archives, and having plenty of firsthand experience in the place itself, absorbing its character and personality” (Schnell et al. 2013, 1). Because place identity is complex and may manifest itself differently in different localities, the use of diverse sources is important in exploring and understanding how place identities are shaped, promoted, and reflected in communities. For this study, I used interviews and conversations, “stories,” landscape observation and analysis, an analysis of past and contemporary creative endeavors, and archival works, such as government documents, local histories, newspaper articles, and promotional literature and imagery to understand the evolving roles sheep ranching and the wool industry have played in cultivating place identity.

Interviews and Stories

Field interviews are a critical component in any study attempting to understand places and the people living there. The researcher is trying to understand what makes a
place and its people unique. In order to discover what really matters to people and their perceptions of their place, researchers must spend plenty of time talking with them (de Wit 2013). Scholars rely on field interviews to formulate their narratives of place, whether they are examining a small Illinois mining town (Robertson 2006), an isolated resource-dependent community in northern British Columbia (Larsen 2004), or farm workers experiencing land reform in Western Cape Province, South Africa (Moseley 2006). To understand a place, we must talk with the people who give the place its character.

Flexible interviews leave room for stories. Kent Ryden (1993) suggested flexible interviews are the best way to understand the significance of a place and the experiences people have in that place. Everybody has stories to tell about their past memories and experiences, or memories of earlier generations that were passed down to them. Ryden (1993, 259) also explains that “a familiar landscape provides tangible reminders of the past, solid anchors for memory” and that “memories and experiences [are] fixed to the terrain.” Therefore, when possible, I utilized walking interviews. Rebecca Wheeler (2014) also found walking interviews were more likely to be effective at prompting stories and emotions about the place and landscape. For example, for Kevin Halverson, a fourth generation Sweet Grass County sheep rancher, “any ranch in sight could start a story” (Doig 1978, 13). He and other ranchers took me on walking and driving tours of parts of their land. A crumbling homesteaded house prompts a narrative of how a family arrived. Expansive views from a windy hill in Sweet Grass County or a mountain in Elko County prompted stories of neighbors and friends grazing sheep in different places within
the scene. Stories and experiences happen in places, and it is easier to conjure up past stories when immersed in the storied landscape.

Every interview and conversation could not happen immersed in the landscape. Scholars have found other ways to elicit stories and memories, including the use of maps (Graybill 2013) and photographs. I often used maps or interviewees’ personal photos as an additional means of helping participants recall personal experiences and stories. Maps were used for interviews conducted with some sheep ranchers in Sweet Grass County and Elko County and also with former Basque herders. Participants in all three case studies voluntarily found personal photographs and talked with me about their memories associated with the photographs.

Flexibility can be advantageous when conducting field interviews, but it is also useful to have a questionnaire or question guide in order to focus the conversations and address topics pertinent to the study (Moseley 2006; Schackel 2011; de Wit 2013). I used questionnaires published by other scholars conducting sense of place, identity, and community attachment studies for guidance for my own list of questions (Wiltsie 1998; Haggerty 2004; Warren 2008; Schackel 2011). For Sweet Grass County and Elko County, I used two sets of basic questionnaires (see Appendix A). One was used for community members, while the other focused on family members that were parts of multi-generational sheep ranching families. For Umatilla County, I used a different questionnaire that focused on the role of the Pendleton Woolen Mills in the community and the personal experiences of the workers (see Appendix A).
In order to conduct interviews and hear stories, I first found local residents willing to talk with me in the sheep ranching and woolen mill communities. My initial contacts in all three locations were individuals who were well-known in the community through their involvement with local organizations, their positions at the woolen mill, or their involvement in the sheep industry. To extend my contacts, I relied on the “snowball” technique, a method of finding contacts that uses existing connections (de Wit 2013). Schackel (2011, xi) describes her experience using the “snowball” method in interviewing farm and ranch women in the American West as “one woman led me to another, who told me to talk to her neighbor, who said, ‘You should also interview my mother-in-law on the next ranch,’ and so on.” The traditional snowball method did not work for contacting former Pendleton Woolen Mill employees. To find longtime employees of the Pendleton Woolen Mills, I read newspaper articles that contained names of employees and the number of years they worked at the mill. This method led me to one former employee who, during the course of our interview, mentioned names of others who worked at the mill for many years. To contact the former employees she mentioned, I sent out letters first and then followed up with phone calls. In all three case studies, residents over 40 years of age tended to be more available and willing to participate.

During conversations, I took notes on the questionnaire and in a notebook. During formal interviews, most interviewees gave me permission to use an audio recording device that allowed me to transcribe each conversation after the interview. Conversations and interviews that took place during events, such as shearing or festivals, or while
ranchers were working, such as driving around or tending sheep, were not recorded as background sounds did not allow it. Instead, I used detailed note taking, and in some cases, was able to contact the interviewee again to check the details of our conversation.

Talking with individuals involved in the woolen and sheep industries today, those involved in the industries in the past, and other “local geniuses” (Lopez 1989) who know the place were primary components of my fieldwork in all three locations. Interviews and storytelling helped me see the landscape as J.B. Jackson (1997, 336) advocated for, as “the transcript of a significant collective experience.”

Between the Fall of 2012 and the Fall of 2015, I visited Sweet Grass County, Montana to interview residents. During that time, I conducted in-depth, formal interviews with four current and former sheep ranching families (that included perspectives from both wives and husbands), the local mural artist, the county commissioner at the time, and the current and one former newspaper editor. Recurring conversations and interviews took place with two multi-generational sheep ranching families that included the Halverson family and the Langhus family. Informal and flexible interviews also took place with a variety of other Sweet Grass County residents. These flexible interviews took place during community and family shearing events, at a woolgrowers’ meeting, after a presentation of my research to a group of local residents, and while touring the wool warehouse. I also heard from current and former sheep ranch owners, workers, or wives and daughters of sheepmen, a local art gallery owner, two museum curators, and short and long-term Sweet Grass residents.
I visited Elko County five times between March 2013 and September 2014. While there, I interviewed current and former sheep ranchers, Basque men and women, and local community residents. Formal and flexible interviews were conducted with four current and former sheep ranchers, ten Elko County residents of Basque descent including restaurant and store owners, former herders, and children of Basque migrants, one Basque historian, one Basque *bertsolari*, and five local non-Basque residents with ranching experience and personal interest in the Basque culture. Interviews took place in Basque restaurants, at historic Basque stores, during the National Basque Festival, while driving and walking around grazing allotments, and at individuals’ homes.

Interviews for the Pendleton (Umatilla County) case study were focused on the role of the Pendleton Woolen Mills in the community and the region. Between May 2014 and May 2015, I visited Pendleton, Oregon on four different occasions and Portland, Oregon on one occasion (where the Pendleton Woolen Mills’ headquarters are located). I also had follow-up interviews over the phone. I formally interviewed seven current and former Pendleton Woolen Mills employees who have all had various roles at the Pendleton mill or within the company. Formal interviews were conducted at the Pendleton Woolen Mills and in the interviewees’ homes. Additional flexible interviews occurred with one Chamber of Commerce employee, one general manager of a local sheep ranching company and his wife, two local historians, and three additional Pendleton Woolen Mills employees. Flexible interviews took place at the Pendleton mill, at Pendleton’s headquarters, on the streets of Pendleton, in the local museum, and at the historic Cunningham Ranch where a century-long relationship exists between the
company and the ranch. After mill tours, I had informal conversations with seven tourists about their experiences and memories of the mill and its products.

I also made use of interviews recorded earlier by other scholars. Researchers have shown that oral histories are a useful method in exploring people’s memories and experiences (Mondale 1992; Weisiger 2009). The oral histories I listened to or read are personal narratives, so although the “facts” may not always be remembered correctly, they do provide stories, experiences, and insights into how strongly an individual or a family identified with raising sheep in a particular place. Oral histories were most useful and abundant for the Elko County case study. The Elko histories were found in the archives of the Northeastern Nevada Museum and the Western Folklife Center as well as online through University of Nevada’s Center of Basque Studies and The Basque Museum and Cultural Center of Boise, Idaho. The interviews in the archives had been transcribed, so I was able to read through them and find relevant material in five interviews. The online interviews had summaries and keywords. I looked for interview summaries and keywords that contained stories about sheep, herding, hotel life and work, and ranching.

Cultural Landscape Observations, Analysis, and Interpretation

The cultural landscape also reveals a great deal about a place as it is an “autobiography” of human experience in that setting (Lewis 1979a, 12). Landscape features are one way a place’s identity is manifested for all to see. Sheep place names, symbolic and functional buildings, public art, cemetery symbols, and grazing lands are all
visible elements that contribute to the cultural landscape and which hold various meanings for its inhabitants.

Landscapes contain visible features, but overlaying the visible landscape is an “invisible landscape” comprised of memories, usage, and experiences that occurred in certain places (Ryden 1993). Carl Sauer (1956, 289) remarked that geographers should not “limit themselves to what is visually conspicuous” on the landscape for landscapes also contain “history and significance” (Ryden 1999, 522) and “hold cultural meaning” (Robertson 2006, 7). Therefore, reading both the invisible and visible components of a landscape were vital in understanding place identity and the stories each community tells about themselves. For example, many times dwellings and other buildings hold meanings for residents. In his exploration of Tejano communities in South Texas, Dan Arreola (2002, 100) found through interviews that community landmarks and buildings have the power to evoke memory, which Arreola states is “a mnemonic important to many cultures.”

To better understand these connections between the visible and invisible landscape, I explored the visual scene and assessed the degree to which it reflected a place identity oriented to sheep or wool in each case study. For each location, I had a standard method for becoming familiar with the local landscape. I walked the main streets of each town and made note of possible relevant features on the landscape such as public murals, publically displayed art, businesses, community symbols, and places names. I also visited local cemeteries in Big Timber, Elko, and Pendleton and walked through each of them in search of relevant inscriptions on the headstones. Sheep ranching
also impacts the rural landscape, and I drove rural highways and secondary roads in each county, making note of where I saw sheep and sheep-related landscape features, such as lambing sheds and sheep fences. I also chose transects through the region where sheep historically grazed, such as in the Ruby Mountains, the Jarbidge Mountains, and the Independence Mountains of Elko County.

Being familiar with the surrounding landscape in each location also helped when speaking with locals. I was able to incorporate features I saw into conversations and interviews and learn more about particular meanings attributed to various location in the area. Through interviews I also learned where additional sheep-relevant landscape features were located, such as groves of carved aspen trees far off the road on a particular grazing allotment in northeastern Nevada.

The Role of Creative Works: Films, Art, Literature, and Music

The “arts” or creative endeavors, such as films, music, photography, poetry, and nonfiction and fiction writings also tell stories about places and the people who live in them. Visual images captured in films, paintings, and literature are “cultural messages which diverse scholars endeavor to decode” (Baker 2003, 127). Local place-based experiences that are captured through the arts give readers and viewers a sense of that place (Ryden 1993). How have sheeping films, literature, and art portrayed places? And how influential are they? Pete Shortridge (1991) based place-defining literature on its widespread popularity. If viewership or readership is widespread, creative endeavors have the power to shape people’s images and perceptions of places. For example, as DeLyser (2003) has explained, the outpouring of tourists to southern California came
after the publication of Helen Hunt Jackson’s novel *Ramona*. In addition, Harvey (2011) shows how John Ford’s films and Zane Grey’s novels shaped public perception of certain western places and landscapes.

In each study area, I explored how art is used as an expression of local and regional identity and reflects values and cultural trends (Baker 2003). I visited art galleries, gift shops, coffee shops, sidewalk vendors, and events to see what organizations and individuals displayed and sold. At each site, relevant objects, such as sheep t-shirts, postcards, stuffed animals, and blankets were part of gift shop, store, and individual vendors’ inventories. Where it was possible, I also talked with artists and store managers to detail their narratives of how sheep-themed art reflected and shaped local place identity.

Forbes (2000) suggests that films are useful for exploring the creation of place and identity. I analyzed films in all three case studies. In Sweet Grass County and Elko County, relevant films included a documentary set in each place produced by outside individuals. I not only used the films to help understand their role in creating and reflecting place identity, but I also talked with residents to understand local perceptions of the films and their accuracy. Relevant films for exploring Pendleton Woolen Mills also included short promotional films produced by the company that focused on the company’s heritage.

The Role of Sheep-Centered Community Events

Community events, such as festivals, parades, and county fairs frequently commemorate heritage. They offer insights into intra-community perspectives and what
residents deem important. In Ros Derrett’s study (2003, 57) of four different communities’ festivals, he concluded that community festivals are “the outward manifestation of the identity of the community and provide a distinctive identifier of place and people.” Heritage festivals are popular in both urban and rural areas. Arreola (2002) noted that in South Texas, small towns in particular have seen an increase in the popularity of celebrating their heritage. Communities in small western places have begun to capitalize on their vanishing sheep ranching heritage. Some places have shown great success in attracting outsiders, such as the Trailing of the Sheep Festival in Sun Valley, Idaho. Paul Starrs (2002, 6) noted of ranching that “almost everyone is in some way enchanted by the lifestyle.” Tourism celebrating heritage and the past is popular throughout the United States. In Wilber, Nebraska, the rural community celebrates its Czech heritage with an annual festival in the summer. Zeitler’s study (2009) of the Wilber Czech Festival concluded that not only does the festival offer local and regional Czech-Americans a place to commemorate their heritage, but it also provides non-Czechs a place to learn about the culture. A ranching heritage can also be celebrated, and celebrating its heritage is a way to educate the public and bring attention to its rich history.

While each of the case studies celebrates its heritage with organized festivals and parades, the frequency and focus differed between the communities. Elko, Nevada hosts its annual Basque Festival the first weekend in July. Although the Basque Festival does not focus solely on the sheeping heritage of the place and people, the festival does highlight this part of the past with several events. Carmelo Urza (1999), a Basque himself
and an expert Basque historian, noted that the Basques migrating to North America engaged in a variety of economic activities, but their impact was greatest in the sheep industry. Because of their impact on the sheep industry, North American Basque festivals tend to commemorate this important part of their “New World” heritage in the American West. I attended the National Basque Festival in 2013 and 2014. While at the festival, I talked with attendees about the festival and how it has changed.

Although not held in Sweet Grass County, the annual autumn Reed Point Sheep Run is an event many Sweet Grass residents attend every fall. More importantly for local residents, however, are annual parades where sheep-themed floats regularly appear. Annual agricultural fairs attended by local school children and the general public also include sheep-related events, such as working with wool demonstrations. I attended a homecoming parade in 2014 where students decorated their floats using their mascot (the Sheepherder) and sheep-themed language. I also talked with local residents about the role of parades and fairs and read published interviews and editorials from the community newspaper pertinent to the topic of local parades and fairs.

Annual festivals celebrating the Pendleton Woolen Mills were not a substantial part of this study. The Woolen Mills has been historically connected to the town’s largest celebration, the Pendleton Round-up Rodeo, through their sponsorship and blankets given to winning participants. The company’s heritage, however, was recently celebrated at its 100th anniversary event held in Pendleton, and I examined press coverage and the company’s promotional materials related to that event.
Archival Research

Place identity can also be revealed by examining newspaper articles, agricultural bulletins, promotional literature and imagery, and other historical materials produced to highlight local history. To understand contemporary places and how they have changed, it is useful to combine archival research with fieldwork for “the more one knows from other sources, the more one sees in the field and the more securely one understands. Different data sets interact” (Harris 2001, 330). To access different archival collections, I visited local museums, libraries, and historical societies at each location. Online archives were also used.

**Newspapers:** Local newspapers cover issues important to the region, and they also create community identity (Buttimer 1980). Newspaper stories of day-to-day activities in a place indicate to the community what makes their place distinctive and are an important element in shaping the relationship and identity between people and place (Burgess and Gold 1985). Local newspapers provide a familiar voice and define and reflect the character of a place (Brown 2006). Peirce Lewis (1979b, 43) observes that “good local journalism is critical to a sense of place.” One way to explore “good local journalism” is through “story.” Scholars have shown that “story” or narrative is a powerful tool in connecting people to place and shaping community identities (Dominy 2001; Sampson and Goodrich 2009). In Jim Holtje’s book (2011), *The Power of Storytelling*, he argues we are hardwired for stories, and it is how we make sense of the world and communicate that sense to others. Storytelling comes in verbal form as well as written form, such as place-specific stories found in local newspapers. When local newspapers use stories and
narratives, it is an avenue to share individual and community experiences and memories. The printed stories connect a community through a shared remembrance of the past, common knowledge, and memories of a shared heritage. In addition to newspaper stories, the “Letters to the Editor” sections of local newspapers were important sources of information for they contain opinions written by local residents that provided illumination on various issues from an “insider” perspective (Wiltsie 1998). Furthermore, non-local newspapers or magazines that carry stories about a place also indicate an outsider appreciation or curiosity.

Local and regional newspapers and magazines were critical sources of information for all three case studies. As I searched newspaper archives, I made note of their coverage of issues pertinent to sheep ranching and milling. This included stories about sheep-related events, such as shearing or sheep festivals, daily coverage of wool prices, or historical narratives that reviewed past chapters of sheep-related local history. I also focused on more recent articles that included a heritage aspect, such as spotlights on sheep ranching families, corporate identity, and celebrations of sheep ranching or milling traditions.

Sweet Grass County has had one primary newspaper since 1887, the Big Timber Pioneer. I accessed online papers from 1890-2003 through the Montana Memory Project and hard copies of the paper printed before 1890 and after 2003 from the Montana Historical Society in Helena and the Crazy Mountain Museum in Big Timber. Online access made it possible to use keyword searches that included “sheep,” “herder,” “wool,” “mascot,” “shearing,” and “wagon.” The Crazy Mountain Museum staff keeps a record
and archived copy of any newspaper stories (local and regional) related to the community’s sheep ranching heritage. This helped in finding articles that were not available online. During interviews, events or community discussions were sometimes mentioned which helped me narrow down dates. For example, Beccy Oberly mentioned discussions that occurred within the Letters to the Editor section after an article was printed about changing the high school mascot. Although she did not have the exact date, she knew the year and the season, which helped streamline my search. For articles printed after November of 2012, I watched the local paper for relevant articles.

For the Elko County case study, I examined the *Elko Daily Free Press* and its alternative titles, which has been in print since 1883. It officially became the *Elko Daily Free Press* in 1932. I accessed articles in the Northeastern Nevada Museum archives and the Western Folklife Center (WFC) archives. Articles after 2012 were available online at elkodaily.com with a paid subscription. Much of the Elko case study explores the Basques’ connection to the sheep industry and their influence on the community. Their most enduring influences have been the National Basque Festival, the boardinghouses and restaurants, and tree carvings (arborglyphs) in the nearby mountains. The National Basque Festival has been held near the 4th of July weekend since 1966. Therefore, I could search for articles related to the festival a few weeks before and after that weekend for each year. The museum and WFC both keep a detailed record of articles from local and regional papers and magazines concerned with the Basques, including their involvement with sheep, the festival, boardinghouses, and area tree carvings. The WFC had copies of all of their logged articles. While the museum had some of the clippings of articles, I also
relied on their log that included article title, date, and keywords. I then looked up the articles in their newspaper archives. For more recent articles that I could obtain online, I used keywords, such as “herding,” “sheep,” “arborglyphs,” and “Basques.” During interviews, two individuals also gave me newspaper and magazine articles that featured their involvement with the local sheep industry.

The *East Oregonian* has been Pendleton, Oregon’s principal newspaper since 1888. I examined newspapers at the archives of the Pendleton Public Library, the Umatilla County Historical Society, and the Oregon Historical Society. Select years were also available online through the Library of Congress’s *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* directory (1904-1922) and the University of Oregon (partial 1892, partial 1897, 1900-1903). Beginning in 2008, articles were available on the *East Oregonian*’s website. For years available online, I used keyword searches including “wool,” “mill,” “woolen,” “sheep,” and “Bishop.” For years not available online, I relied on the library’s, both of the historical society’s, and the Pendleton Woolen Mills’ logs of articles and their clippings files. Additionally, I searched through the newspapers for the years between 1942 and 1945 to see if pertinent articles were printed concerning World War II and the mill’s labor force. Non-local magazine and newspaper articles and advertisement were also critical sources of information. These were found through the archives’ clipping files as well as through internet searches. I primarily used Google, Google News, and American Periodicals.

**Promotional Documents:** How did each of the three case study locations promote their region in 1880? In 1920? Today? David Wrobel (2002, 6) notes that there are a
number of different people and organizations who contribute to promotional imagery. He lists “local newspaper and journal editors, local commercial clubs, local and state-level chambers of commerce, along with immigration societies, boards of agriculture, real estate agents, speculators, and landowners, writers for the railroads, and outside colonization societies” as image makers. Promotional materials are not a thing of the past. Some places, in order to preserve their sheeping heritage, find contemporary ways to promote their place and identity. Companies, including Pendleton Woolen Mills, also use aspects of place in their branding and promotional materials (Shortridge 1996; Schnell 2013; Fletchall 2016; Quintana 2016).

Promotional materials were used primarily for the Elko County and Pendleton Woolen Mill sites. For Elko County, relevant promotional materials focused on the National Basque Festival. Material was found in the Western Folklife archives during the Fall of 2013 and the Northeastern Nevada Museum archives during the Summer of 2014. Festival program covers, newspaper advertisements and highlights, and regional magazine promotional stories reflected the degree in which the Basque community emphasized their sheep ranching heritage in the American West during different time periods.

I relied heavily on promotional materials for the Pendleton Woolen Mills case study that I found in Pendleton Woolen Mill’s company archives in Portland, Oregon when I visited in September of 2014. I also found useful promotional materials at the Pendleton Public Library and online through websites associated with the company. I performed a content analysis on the company’s past and present advertisements found in
magazines, advertising brochures, posters, and more recently, online campaigns such as websites and social media. While analyzing the imagery and text used, I looked at the ways in which landscapes and place shaped messages about a sheep heritage. This included the emphasis on the company’s history in Oregon and their beginnings in Umatilla County. I also examined the use of local and regional landscapes in advertising imagery and the naming of products.

**Government Documents:** Works Projects Administration (WPA) Livestock and Grazing History Papers stored at Montana State University’s Special Collections provided stories of sheep ranching during the 1930s and early 1940s. Sweet Grass County was the only case study in which I found relevant papers. Walter Taylor, a writer with the WPA, detailed the sheep shearing process in Sweet Grass County during the late 1930s. The information contained in his essay helped in understanding how the industry has changed, especially as it relates to community involvement and community identity.

For Sweet Grass County and Elko County, I also consulted United States agricultural census reports to show actual numbers of sheep in each place through time. In addition to census reports, I examined USDA bulletins to understand livestock trends in each area and to highlight the importance of the sheep economies in these regional settings.

**Local History Sources:** Local history sources are integral for an understanding of a place’s character. As Robertson (2001, 22-33) noted, “recognizing that place is rooted in the history of ordinary people” it is useful to use “locally produced histories…to assist
in interpreting place meaning.” The texts can provide insights into “the lives of ordinary people in ordinary landscapes” (Robertson 2001, 22). Richard Francaviglia (1991), in exploring mining landscapes, found that local museums are a logical spot to being to discover a region’s landscape history. Kent Ryden (1993, 527) used local histories to grasp the “particularities of that place.” Books and family histories published by residents and local societies provided a lens showing how local people saw themselves and their community. They reflect the “big” things, such as political and military events, and the “little” things, such as unique patterns of work, the economy, and everyday life, that the community sees as important to their place (Ryden 1999).

Local histories were used to help reconstruct the sheep ranching and woolen industry stories in each case study. For Sweet Grass County, I found local histories at the Crazy Mountain Museum in Big Timber and in Montana State University’s Special Collections. I focused on local histories at the Crazy Mountain Museum and in the Special Collections during the Fall of 2012 and the Spring of 2013. I read and analyzed family histories at the museum that were submitted by locals. Some of the histories are available for the general public to read in one of the museum’s permanent exhibits, while other histories are typed or hand-written and stored in the archives. The Special Collections contains both volumes of Pioneer Memories. The 1960 and 1980-1981 volumes were a project completed by the Pioneer Society of Sweet Grass County. They contain stories and locally-submitted histories of families in the county. The local histories of Sweet Grass County provided insight on when and how families became involved in the industry, how the settlement rush affected the industry, patterns of
grazing movements, community involvement in the industry, and how the industry has changed.

Elko County local histories were found in the Northeastern Nevada Museum archives and from the personal collections of local residents during the Summer of 2014. Local histories in the museum archives contained stories of Basque families written by local residents. Stories of first-generation Basques in Elko County often times include experiences with the sheep industry. Many locally written histories provide vignettes of the Basque experiences herding sheep or working in boardinghouses.

Pendleton’s locally produced histories were found in the archives of the Umatilla County Historical Society and the Pendleton Public Library during August and September of 2014. The local histories included books and magazines containing stories of the Pendleton Woolen Mills and their influence on the community.

Conclusion

J.B. Jackson (1995, 48) wrote that “if the study of landscapes is to acquire intellectual appeal, then it must venture into the field of cultural comparisons, and into the philosophical origins of these patterns that are inscribed on the surface of the earth.” The sheep and woolen industries played a central role in shaping the place identities of Elko County, Nevada, Sweet Grass County, Montana, and Umatilla County, Oregon. Historically, it was a way of life that was central to the making of each place. The industries did not, however, unfold exactly the same in each place, and this research compares and contrasts how each place and its people have adapted to the changing
industry since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The narratives of this research include stories of families, communities, and places. To many outsiders, the stories are unknown. They are, however, worth knowing. For places and the accompanying stories matter not only to the people living in them, but also to others, who hope to understand and appreciate how the world works.
To understand the local stories of sheep grazing in each of the case studies, it is important to first recognize the layered regional pattern of sheep grazing in the West and the nation. The narrative of sheep grazing in the West is a story of dramatic successes, failures, and frequent transitions and adaptations. Since their inception, western American sheep grazing practices can be examined at a variety of scales, from global and national impacts of the industry to how these activities have shaped local communities, shifting regional demands for labor, and land use changes. The regional patterns of sheeping across the West have also changed throughout the centuries. Early nodes were concentrated where the Spanish settled, but subsequently a geographically extensive area across much of the West was impacted as the demand for wool grew in national and international markets. As prices and demand dropped in the second half of the twentieth century, new sheep raising patterns emerged that reflected changing market conditions.

The sheeping narrative is also a story of transformed lives and landscapes. Europeans first coerced Native Americans into their cultural system that included the raising of livestock. Some Native Americans embraced it, such as the Navajo and Pueblos, and soon they adopted the practice into their own cultural system. Eventually, immigrants from Europe, Central America, and South America also became involved in the industry. As new groups of people became involved, they imprinted the landscape in different ways and at different scales.
Sheep ranching has also altered environments. The addition of sheep, as well as cattle, goats, and horses, to western landscapes added pressure to environments that were home to elk, pronghorns, and deer (Dasmann 1998). Landscapes, however, were altered differently. Patterns of land use varied depending on the era, season, and region. Later the United States government also became involved in the American sheep and wool industry through such measures as the creation of U.S. Forest Service grazing allotments, the Taylor Grazing Act (1934), the “Sheepherder Bills” of the 1950s related to importing foreign laborers, the wool incentive program, and the passing of various environmental acts. The western sheep industry was and remains a complex system with many actors, and since the seventeenth century, it has been continually evolving.

**Sheep in the West: 1598-1848**

The first sheep ranching activities in the West were primarily an era of Spanish then Mexican control. After the Spanish brought sheep to the present-day Southwest, sheep numbers increased, but not to the extent that would occur when mining districts were discovered across the American West after 1848 and railroads opened up the West and connected the region to outside markets.

**The Spanish and Mexican Southwest**

The Spanish and their sheep breeds were the foundation of the commercial sheep industry in the West. Over time, they established several different centers of livestock in the West that included an important and enduring presence in New Mexico and California as well as more temporary impacts across Texas. Toward the latter part of the
first era, as settlement was expanding in parts of the West, other Euro-Americans established additional centers where sheep were common, such as in western Oregon. While sheep and sheep products were consumed locally, they were also important regional items of trade, especially within both New Spain and Mexico.

Spanish settlement in the West included the missions and presidios and both became centers of sheep activity (Bolton 1917; Aiken 1983). The Spanish used the missions to provide protection to their colonists as well convert, civilize, and exploit Native Americans already living in the region. The missions also served as centers of agriculture and manufacturing (Aiken 1983). Sheep were valuable to the missions as they provided meat and fiber for the local population as well as revenue for the Spanish officials. While the missions endured, sheep multiplied.

The missions declined in importance by the early 1830s after Mexican independence. As they declined, other changes were also occurring in the region. The rise of the ranchos, especially in California was based in traditions of Spanish and Mexican land grants to individuals, and came to influence the region, including the sheep industry. The rancho system became an important focus of activity until the end of the Mexican period in 1848.

The origins of the Spanish and Mexican traditions extend deep into the past. In 1598, Juan de Oñate, a Spanish Basque conquistador, and his soldiers travelled north to present day northern New Mexico from Santa Bárbara, a mining town in southern Chihuahua. Their arrival ushered in a new cultural system that transformed the region and eventually the entire West. One part of this new cultural system, long established in
Iberia as well as New Spain, was the raising of domestic livestock, such as cattle, horses, goats, and sheep. Oñate and his crew established their first settlement near the junction of the Chama and Rio Grande Rivers in September 1598, and founded the first mission, San Gabriel, later that year (Wentworth 1948). The Spanish established more missions in New Mexico along the Rio Grande corridor from Taos to Socorro and westward as far as Zuni and east of the Manzano Mountains (Baxter 1987). At each of the missions, livestock, particularly sheep, were eventually part of the mix as these animals provided meat and wool for local consumption (Denevan 1967). As livestock numbers increased, sheep were also exported to other portions of New Spain, especially to population centers further south.

Oñate and his entourage laid the foundation for the sheep industry to flourish when they brought 4,000 sheep to New Mexico. Between 1620 and 1670, livestock numbers increased significantly (Baxter 1987). Rather than consuming and keeping all of the livestock in the New Mexican settlements, trade occurred for sheep and wool along what became known as the *Camino Real*, or Chihuahua Trail (Figure 2-1). The *Camino Real* was the main north-south thoroughfare that connected settlements along the Rio Grande to cities further south in New Spain. Beginning in Taos and passing through Santa Fe, Albuquerque, El Paso, and on to New Spain’s commercial and mining centers of Chihuahua, Durango, Zacatecas, and terminating in Mexico City, the route provided an important corridor for travel and trade between settlements on the frontier and New Spain cities (Denevan 1967; Simmons 2001). For isolated New Mexican settlements, sheep and
wool were important exports leaving the region while tools, dry goods, and weapons were imported (Baxter 1987; Dunmire 2013).

Figure 2-1. Trade occurred along the *Camino Real* and connected settlements along the Rio Grande to cities further south in New Spain. Map by author.
One of the earliest markets for New Mexican sheep developed in the first half of the seventeenth century. When silver was discovered in northern Mexico and the town of Parral was created in 1631, the mining district provided an important livestock market for New Mexican sheep. Local livestock and farming sprang up near the mine to feed the laborers, but the district still required imports (Baxter 1987). As New Mexican sheep numbers increased, mining settlements in Mexico became important markets, and New Mexican sheep were driven to other mining settlements as well in Chihuahua (Simmons 2001; Dunmire 2013).

Exports were suspended, however, with the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Although the Pueblo Indians continued to raise some sheep, numbers were much lower when the Spanish returned in 1693 (Dunmire 2013). To increase the numbers, sheep were once again imported and distributed among the missions, New Mexican families, bachelors, widows, and orphans (Baxter 1987). It took several years to reestablish the sheep industry and build sheep numbers enough for exports, but eventually, the numbers would climb higher than ever before on New Mexico’s ranges.

The eighteenth century saw sheep proliferate in New Mexico. Following the Spanish reconquest of the region in the late seventeenth century, the Spanish Crown had distributed sheep to a variety of people. Eventually, however, ownership of the majority of flocks was concentrated in the hands of wealthy families who obtained large land grants from the Spanish Crown (Wentworth 1948). Rather than simply supply local consumption, these wealthy and powerful merchants were engaged in an economic system connecting them to regions further south where there was more demand for sheep.
One such region was Chihuahua, which grew as a principal mining and commercial center, and consequently, a place where New Mexican merchants traded their sheep for manufactured goods (Baxter 1987). Each year, thousands of sheep were trailed southward where demand was high for not only the sheep, but also pelts and blankets woven by Native Americans from the wool (Wentworth 1948). As the eighteenth century came to a close, sheep exports to the south continued to increase.

After the Mexicans gained control of the present-day Southwest from the Spanish in 1821, the sheep industry changed. Baxter (1987) labeled the years 1821-1846 “The Peak Years” for sheep in New Mexico. Ranchers continued to place great importance on raising sheep. Travelers along the recently opened Santa Fe Trail took note of the importance placed on sheep in the local economy. In Josiah Gregg’s account of the Santa Fe Trail (Baxter 1987, 90), published as Commerce of the Prairies in 1844, he noted that sheep were “the staple production of New Mexico, and the principal article of exportation.” New Mexicans continued to export sheep to Chihuahua and other nearby regions (Weber 1982). Additional grazing lands were needed in northern New Mexico to support the flocks. The Navajo were to the west, so ranchers began to move east of the mountains into present-day San Miguel and Guadalupe counties (Baxter 1987).

It is difficult to estimate the number of sheep in New Mexico prior to 1850. Denevan (1967) notes some documentation indicating up to 3 million sheep, while others such as David Weber (1982) claim far fewer. Weber (1982) cites some estimates of only a quarter a million sheep in 1827. Denevan (1967, 696) writes, “during the Spanish and Mexican periods there was, surprisingly, little mention of stock numbers in New Mexico
by local writers. There were, however, many general references to the importance of sheep raising.” While numbers prior to 1850 are not firm, the value of sheep and their products to the local and regional economy is apparent. New Mexico was sheep country.

Native Americans and Sheep Raising in the Southwest

Some Native American tribes, such as the Apaches, showed little interest in adapting sheep raising into their cultural system (Meinig 1971). Other groups, however, experienced dramatic cultural changes as they embraced sheep as part of their culture. Two such groups were the Pueblo Indians and the Navajo (Jordan 1993). Pueblo Indian converts were given responsibility over mission livestock in the early 1600s. As they had to guard the animals, they became more proficient in the tending of the sheep. Pueblo Indians were also skilled cotton weavers, and by the 1660s they began to weave with wool shorn from the *churros*, an ancient Iberian breed of sheep imported to the American West known for its hardiness and coarse wool (Dunmire 2013).

The Navajo were introduced to sheep raising after the Pueblo Indians had become proficient in tending sheep and using their wool in their weavings. Navajos, along with Apaches, began raiding Spanish sheep operations by the 1670s (Dunmire 2013). Twelve years after the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, the Spanish returned to the Rio Grande. A large number of Puebloans fled to Navajo Country to avoid Spanish revenge. During this period, it appears Navajos and Puebloans learned from one another, and the Puebloans passed on their knowledge of raising livestock and working with wool (Jett 2001; Dunmire 2013). For the first half of the eighteenth century, Navajos tended small flocks of sheep and goats. Although scholars have not been able to reconstruct the exact genesis
of Navajo pastoralism, based on Spanish letters and the archaeological record, it appears that by 1740-1750 Navajos had developed a way of life that revolved around pastoralism (Jett 2001; Weisiger 2009). Their way of life changed from being nomadic hunters, gatherers, and raiders to a pastoral people who practiced transhumance with their sheep and goats. Sheep eventually became a central part of their identity and “sheep is life” became a familiar expression to generations of Navajos.

**Spanish and Mexican Patterns in Texas and California**

Spanish settlement extended along the Rio Grande, and farmers, soldiers, and missionaries brought sheep with them into present-day Texas as they developed ranches and missions (Carlson 1982). In 1674, sheep were sent to a mission in present-day Edwards County. By 1683, missions were established at La Junta between present-day Presidio, Texas and Ojinaga, Chihuahua. The missions here received the most attention from the Spanish for the remainder of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century. Missions around present-day San Antonio received sheep next in the period between 1718-1731. Between 1726 and 1749, the Spanish presidio of La Bahia, near present-day Victoria boasted sheep as well (Wentworth 1948). Although the Texas sheep industry, orchestrated by Euro-Americans, would eventually flourish and become an important center in later periods, the earliest centers of Spanish interests declined. By the early nineteenth century, Spanish missionaries in Texas had disappeared, and with markets dwindling for wool and mutton, sheep lost their importance (Carlson 1982). When sheep reentered the region as a result of Euro-American interests in the nineteenth
century, they had profound effects on the area in terms of the landscape and social geography.

Sheep were also important in Spanish California. The Spanish established missions and brought with them sheep, cattle, goats, horses, donkeys, and domestic fowl (Dasmann 1998). In 1769 the first mission, Mission San Diego de Alcalá, was founded in Upper California (Wentworth 1948). The Spanish Franciscans established more missions along the coast of present-day California (Towne and Wentworth 1945). Livestock proliferated at the Spanish missions, and during the early 1800s, it is estimated that the California missions controlled 300,000 sheep and 400,000 cattle (Dasmann 1998).

In the early nineteenth century, the Spanish missions declined in importance and became secularized as land was placed in private hands. These changes brought in what is known as the rancho period, and a new system of raising livestock dominated. Although sheep were still raised, cattle ranching became the more prestigious practice in the 1830s and 1840s. Overall, sheep numbers during this period declined in California.

**Euro-American Arrival in the Northwest**

The earliest flocks of sheep in the Pacific Northwest came from varying sources. The Hudson Bay Company brought small numbers of sheep to the Pacific Northwest from California beginning in the early 1830s. By the early 1840s, they were importing various sheep breeds from England (Lomax 1941). Emigration societies and missionaries that settled from the Willamette Valley to the Clatsop Plains also raised small numbers of sheep beginning in the 1840s. When Euro-Americans started crossing the West along the Oregon Trail, some settlers brought sheep with them to the Willamette Valley. Hesitant at
first to trail and herd sheep thousands of miles across the West, they soon found that the sheep “traveled better, and proved on the journey more thrifty, than either horses or oxen, climbing the mountains and swimming the rivers with unabated sprite fullness during a journey of 2,000 miles” (Howison 1913, 53). The initial purpose of the small number of sheep that joined the caravan across the West was to feed the settlers along the route. With knowledge of the sheep’s successful trailing, however, some caravans, notably one led by Joseph Watt in 1848, brought improved breeds of sheep, such as Merinos, from the east with the purpose of establishing flocks in Oregon (Lomax 1941). As more immigrant trains arrived and families settled in western Oregon in the late 1840s, sheep numbers slowly increased.

**Western Sheep Ranching: 1848-1900**

When gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill in California in 1848, it was the beginning of a new era in the American West. It brought about changes in the livestock industry, including the sheep industry. Several factors stimulated sheep ranching in the West. Sheep were trailed to many of the West’s mining districts to feed hungry miners. Railroads also opened up settlement and stimulated the sheep industry. They provided a link for regional, eastern, and foreign markets. Prices were often high for wool and meat, particularly between the Civil War and World War I (Skaggs 1986). In addition to favorable and relatively inelastic prices, lax government regulations concerning the public domain resulted in cheap feed as sheep could be trailed to and fed on public lands. After 1849, Euro-American dominance in the western sheep industry grew. Their
management strategies were largely oriented around a large scale, commercial sheep
economy and the involvement of the government through regulations. Immigrants to the
West also saw an opportunity in herding sheep that contributed to even greater cultural
diversity in the West. All of these factors led to the geographical expansion of the West’s
“sheep country,” and by the end of the nineteenth century, sheep outnumbered cattle in
most western states (Rowley 1985).

The geography of sheep in the West evolved over time. The 1850 livestock census
still shows the legacy of Spanish involvement in raising sheep for meat and wool (Figure
2-2). Sheep were most prevalent in the Rio Grande Valley as well as along the coast of
California. Spanish influence in raising sheep in Texas waned by the 1790s, but eastern
Texas again began to emerge as fine sheep country in the 1820s. By 1850, immigrants
from England, Scotland, and Germany were engaged in the sheep industry, bringing to
the Texas prairies improved sheep breeds that produced more meat and wool (Carlson
1982). Early Mormon settlements in northern Utah were also engaged in the sheep
business. In 1850, the Pacific Northwest included a few thousand head of sheep from
erlier efforts of the Hudson Bay Trading Company as well as the recent arrival of
settlers from the Midwest and East (Lomax 1941). As the 1850 map shows (Figure 2-2),
the remainder of the West was devoid of any large-scale sheeping influence, but within
three decades, that changed quickly as mines and the Civil War created a stimulus for
raising sheep, and regional and national railroad networks provided a means for the
commercial expansion of the industry.
Figure 2-2. 1850 Agricultural Census sheep numbers. Map by author (USBC 1850; Manson et al. 2017).
The mining frenzy created an initial large-scale demand for mutton. As mining camps sprang up across the far West, the livestock followed. California was the first mining mecca in the West. Following the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill, settlements flourished, creating new markets for meat, both beef and mutton. Mutton became an important food staple for the miners, and the sheep population grew. In 1849, it is estimated there were 20,000 sheep in California. By 1860, the number had climbed to 1,000,000 (Jelink 1998). In a matter of ten years, the sheep population increased 50-fold (Figure 2-3).
Figure 2-3. 1860 Agricultural Census. Map by author (USBC 1860; Manson et al. 2017).

High demand and prices led sheepmen to send their flocks to California.
Stockmen trailed sheep to the California mines primarily from New Mexico, Texas, and the Middle West where numerous sheep were available (Jelink 1998). New Mexico was the first “hub” for the western sheep industry, and by 1860, 551,000 sheep were trailed from New Mexico to California (Carlson 1982; Holliday 1999). Some of the most famous of the West’s early sheep drives took place from the Rio Grande Valley to the California mines. Two of the best-known drives to mining markets were those by Richens "Uncle Dick" Wootton in 1852 and by Kit Carson in 1853 who trailed 9,000 and 6,500 sheep, respectively (Carlson 1982; Patterson et al. 1991). Other regions supplied smaller quantities of sheep to the mining market, including Oregon and Texas. When gold was discovered in Colorado in 1858, New Mexico sheepmen again supplied miners with food, sending sheep north (Towne and Wentworth 1945).

The 1850 and 1860 maps do not show sheep in Nevada. The Nevada landscape did, however, feed thousands of sheep during those years. Sheep trailed across the semiarid ranges of Nevada on their way to California mining settlements. The Overland Trail was a common route (Kilker and Koch 1978). Although sheep fed off of the Nevada ranges, few stayed as the region was isolated and there was no nearby market. When mining settlements first appeared in western Nevada in the late 1860s, a market appeared, and sheepmen trailed sheep across the Sierras to the area and established flocks nearby (Laxalt 1977; Patterson et al. 1991). As prospectors continued exploring Nevada and finding more metals, the sheepmen and their flocks followed (Wentworth 1948). Nevada mines boosted the local sheep population initially, but they were not able to sustain the state’s sheep industry. Other factors in later decades, such as railroad connections to
markets, had more impact on the industry.

One way the Euro-American impact can be seen in the sheep industry is through the use of different sheep breeds. California stockmen, followed by sheep ranchers in other western regions, had been raising improved breeds of sheep. The *churro* sheep that was initially trailed to California from New Mexico was a tough breed that could handle semiarid regions, but its wool was long and coarse, and its stature was small. Letters and journals commented that the meat was notably exquisite, but with a large demand, ranchers wanted a sheep breed that could produce more meat (Baxter 1987). California stockmen introduced other breeds, such as French and Spanish Merinos, English Cotswolds, Leicesters, Southdowns, and Australian sheep (Jelink 1998). The improved stock, which produced more meat per animal and grew better wool for commercial textile mills than the traditional long, coarse-haired Spanish *churro*, met the demand for not only mutton markets, but wool markets in the northeastern part of the United States. Sheep ranchers in other western regions soon followed California’s lead and began importing and breeding improved sheep breeds, indicating that the western sheep industry was not isolated, but was becoming increasingly integrated into the national economy.

By the later 1850s, California, with its improved sheep, was home to incredible amounts of wool. In 1858, San Francisco opened the state’s first woolen mill (St. Clair 1998). With an immense supply of local and regional wool as well as available labor, more woolen mills opened in parts of the West in the following years. For several decades, California woolen mills were some of the largest in the western region. Part of the reason for the success of California mills was location. The majority of western sheep
were in or near California. Without transcontinental and even larger regional railway networks, moving wool was difficult. Before railways were used, wool was hauled on wagons or on barges down waterways.

The Pacific Northwest was another western region that continued to expand and improve its sheep industry. Oregon sheepmen focused on importing pureblooded Merinos from Ohio and Australia, and soon Merinos became synonymous with the growing Willamette Valley sheep industry (Lomax 1941). Between 1850 and 1860 as more immigrants arrived in western Oregon, the number of sheep increased by more than 70,000 (Minnesota Population Center 2011). As shown on the 1860 map (Figure 2-3), the majority of sheep were located in the Willamette Valley.

During the 1860s, western Oregon was undergoing accelerated changes that in turn affected the sheep industry in the state. Wheat became a more important and profitable crop in the Willamette Valley, gradually displacing sheep pastures. Although the Willamette Valley was still the center of sheep raising in the state, a movement east of the Cascade Mountains began (Lomax 1941; Robbins 1997). In the early 1860s, as more land was being consumed to grow wheat in the Willamette Valley, stockmen began to see the land east of the Cascades as a “world of rich grass” (Minto 1902, 230). Additionally, the Columbia River provided a shipping corridor for wool from inland Oregon to the larger coastal shipping points and markets. Towns along the Columbia, such as The Dalles and Arlington, grew in importance as wool shipping points as stockmen could trail their sheep in to these centers to be sheared, and the wool was then shipped west on steamboats (Minto 1902). In addition to competition for land in western
Oregon, mining activity east of the Cascades created a market for livestock (Lomax 1941). More cattle and sheep began to take advantage of eastern Oregon’s “rich grass” and provide beef and mutton to the miners.

Mining was not the only impetus for the raising of sheep in the West. The western sheep industry was also impacted by national events, such as the Civil War that created a stimulus for sheep producers. When the Civil War began in 1861 and the military needed blankets and clothing, they looked to California, Oregon, and New Mexico where quality wool-producing sheep were being raised (Wright 1910). With a new national market and a large demand, the scale of sheep ranching in the West again increased as stockmen added more sheep to their wool-producing flocks.

The 1850 and 1860 maps also show that Texans were major participants in the sheep industry. Regional cultural differences, however, separated Texas Hill Country sheepmen from those in South Texas. The Spanish had initially brought the *churro* to the region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but their influence waned by the late eighteenth century. When Euro-Americans became involved in raising sheep in Texas in the early 1820s, they immediately set about bringing better sheep breeds to the region instead of stocking the ranges with the *churro*. As immigrants from England, Scotland, Germany, and other parts of the United States migrated to the Hill Country of Texas and engaged in sheep raising, they brought improved sheep breeds from Europe that produced more wool and more meat per animal (Carlson 1982).

In contrast, sheep raising in South Texas was still heavily influenced by the Spanish legacy, particularly the continued raising of the *churro* sheep. The *churro* sheep
entered the lower Rio Grande Valley from Mexico beginning in the 1850s. Settlers from the United States were also bringing in improved breeds of sheep, but the *churro* dominated the southern region (Carlson 1982). For the next few decades, as more and more people turned to herding and raising sheep in the Rio Grande Valley, the number of sheep continued to increase. Corpus Christi grew as a major wool market between the 1860s and 1880s (Kilker and Koch 1978). Wool was brought to the port city from all over South Texas and northern Mexico where it was then shipped to New Orleans, Philadelphia, Boston, and other eastern cities (Carlson 1982). Sheep were being raised in other parts of eastern Texas during the 1850s and 1860s, but South Texas remained the primary sheep raising region of the state until the 1880s.

The completion of the first transcontinental railroad (1869) suggested new economic opportunities for western stockmen and textile manufacturers. Long-distance rail connections offered cheaper and quicker access to more markets. When there was a rise in demand for wool in the United States and Europe, particularly between 1871 and the Panic of 1873, it caused prices to rise (Wright 1910). Some ranchers also switched from cattle to sheep in the 1870s after prices plummeted for beef. Sheep offered two raw materials, wool and meat. To further sway ranchers to raise sheep, the wool market, unlike the beef market, remained reliable and stable during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Boag 1990). With a relatively stable market, wool producers expanded their flocks and new growers entered the business, creating great increases in sheep across much of the West between 1870 and 1910. In addition, the West provided a wide assortment of open semiarid settings that offered an ideal environmental niche for
raising sheep. The eleven western states had expansive grasslands and mountainous regions that sheepmen utilized as they practiced transhumance, moving their sheep across great expanses to available feed.

The 1870 map shows the dominance of California in the sheep industry (Figure 2-4). California remained prime sheep country throughout the 1870s. Sheep were trailed from the valleys to High Sierra meadows during the summer months where an abundance of feed was not only available, but also free (Dasmann 1998). Monterey, Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara counties became the centers of the California sheep industry (Jelink 1998).
Figure 2-4. 1870 Agricultural Census and railroad network. Map by author (USBC 1870; Manson et al. 2017).
Although California remained the primary sheep producing region, sheep were beginning to expand to other areas of the West. Whereas the flow of sheep had been primarily westward to California in previous decades, sheepmen were now also moving east and north from New Mexico, the Willamette Valley, and California where the open stock ranges were crowded and closing (Boag 1990; Cassity 2011). As sheepmen left crowded regions, they found productive grazing environments in eastern Oregon and Washington, Nevada, Wyoming, and Colorado. By 1870, sheepmen had moved to inland areas of Washington and Oregon, including southeastern Washington, and The Dalles, the Trout Creek region, and Umatilla County in Oregon. Mining activities in eastern Oregon pulled some sheepmen to the region, but it was water, the abundance of grass, and mountains for summer grazing in the interior Northwest that played a larger role in the sustained increase of sheep numbers.

Railroads dramatically changed landscapes, economies, and lives across the American West (Cronon 1991). With the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads joining together at Promontory Summit, Utah in 1869, the first transcontinental railroad was completed. Some regions were impacted more by the completion of the first transcontinental railroad than others. With the railroad’s arrival, these settings were no longer as isolated from national markets. The railroad’s completion also opened large tracts of land to homesteaders and stockmen in southern Wyoming, northern Nevada, and northern Utah. In Wyoming, domesticated sheep were grazing ranges in the late 1860s, but their numbers increased after the railroad was built. Initially, sheep raising was concentrated on the Laramie Plains in the southeastern part of the state where plenty of
free grass was available, and the railroad was nearby to provide efficient transportation. Nevada’s sheep numbers slowly increased during the 1870s. Sheepmen were finding California’s ranges crowded and began spilling into Nevada. Stockmen’s sheep grazed on the pastures there, and many were then shipped either to California or eastward to feedlots in the Cornbelt region (Wentworth 1948). The Basques, from the Pyrenees Mountains, in particular moved into Nevada in the 1870s (Douglass and Bilbao 1975). They first grazed their sheep in the northwestern part of the state around Reno. As the nineteenth century progressed, the Basques and other sheepmen moved east across Nevada’s wide open ranges.

Considerable numbers of sheep also appeared in eastern Nebraska and Kansas by 1870, but they were raised differently than in most other areas of the West. Rather than trail and feed on the open ranges, sheep in eastern Nebraska and Kansas lived primarily in feedlots where sheepmen sent their range livestock to be fattened. Just as raising sheep moved west, feedlots moved west, too, and the Great Plains states were deemed excellent feeding areas as land was cheaper than it was further east, the relatively drier air meant fewer roofs were needed in the feedlots, and an adequate supply of feed was available nearby (Wentworth 1948).

Sheep country continued to expand across the West through the remaining years of the nineteenth century. One of the driving factors was the continual building of more railroad lines after the first transcontinental line was completed. The Northern Pacific Railroad completed its transcontinental route in 1883, opening up central and southern North Dakota, southern and western Montana, northern Idaho, and the southern half of
Washington. The Great Northern Railway pushed across the West and opened up additional parts of North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, and Washington during the 1880s and 1890s. Ancillary lines provided access to northernmost Wyoming, southern Idaho, and northeastern Oregon. Railroads also crisscrossed the Southwest, opening up Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. As railroad lines were built across the West, sheep followed closely behind.

Regional sheep patterns continued changing across the West during the 1880s and 1890s (Figure 2-5; Figure 2-6). By 1880, the Columbia Plateau in Washington and Oregon arose as an important sheep center, and gradually cattle were pushed out. Meinig (1995) attributes the dominance of sheep over cattle in the Columbia Plateau to several factors. His reasoning also helps explain other parts of the West where sheep became more common than cattle. First, cattle had previously overgrazed the land, reducing its carrying capacity. The vegetation was marginal, but it was adequate for sheep. Sheep also tended to crop the grass closely so cattle were left with nothing. The markets were also influential. Cattle products tended to be more volatile in the marketplace, but the market for wool was steadier. In addition to annual wool sales, stockmen could sell surplus sheep for slaughter when the market was available. Finally, Meinig suggests that because of the drudgery and lack of prestige associated with sheep ranching compared to cattle ranching, the industry did not attract as many careless and uneducated individuals. Some sheepmen even learned about the industry as shepherders first, before becoming owners of flocks. Thus, while the cattle industry fluctuated, the sheep industry steadily expanded into open areas, marginal lands, green and lush mountain pastures in the summer, and to
sagebrush in the winter.

Figure 2-5. 1880 Agricultural Census with railroad network. Map by author (USBC 1880; Manson et al. 2017).
Figure 2-6. 1890 Agricultural Census with railroad network. Map by author (USBC 1890; Manson et al. 2017).
Homesteaders moving into Washington’s Columbia Plateau changed the sheep patterns. Their fences and field crops pushed many sheepmen out of the region, and by 1905, the Columbia Plateau produced more value in wheat than it did in sheep (McGregor 1989). Nearby northern Oregon, however, was less attractive to farmers at this time. Outspoken promoters, such as Marcus Whitman and John Minto, viewed eastern Oregon as exceptional sheep country (Kenny 1963). As sheepmen entered the region, they were surrounded by a moderately dry climate, abundant grasses, large areas of open range, and forests and mountain ranges nearby to allow for summer grazing. Rather than sheep numbers decreasing, central and north central regions of Oregon became home to over 1.4 million head of sheep in 1890 (USBC 1890).

To the east, sheepmen by 1880 were beginning to view Montana as a safe and realistic place to raise sheep. Sheep were not foreign to the area; Jesuit priests at the St. Ignatius Mission brought sheep with them in the 1850s, and sheepmen were trailing sheep into Montana Territory from California and Oregon in the late 1860s and 1870s (Wentworth 1948; Malone et al. 1991). Many headed to the open ranges in the southwestern and central part of the state near the Smith River, the Musselshell River, Helena, and Beaverhead County (Miller 1894; Malone et al. 1991; Minnesota Population Center 2011). Some sheepmen trailed sheep into Montana from California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, and Utah (Wentworth 1948; Malone et al. 1991). Although southeastern Montana was open to expansive rangelands, sheepmen were hesitant to raise sheep there as they feared attacks by Native Americans (Western Historical Publishing Company 1907). During the 1880s, the railroads opened up more land, making it
accessible and connecting it to rest of the country, and the federal government reduced the size of Native American Reservations. Sheepmen quickly took advantage of Montana’s environmental settings and spread throughout the Territory. As more sheep entered Montana, towns along the Northern Pacific line, such as Miles City, Billings, and Big Timber, all grew as important shipping points for sheep and wool. Similar to other western regions, stockmen hauled their wool on wagons pulled by oxen, horses, or mules considerable distances to towns that acted as railroad shipping points.

Sheepmen also continued to expand across Wyoming. During the late nineteenth century, Wyoming was not only home to hundreds of thousands of sheep, but trail drives saw itinerant bands of sheep take advantage of Wyoming’s vast ranges (Wallach 1981). Thousands of sheep from California and Oregon crossed Wyoming on their way to feedlots in the Arkansas Valley during the 1880s and 1890s (Cassity 2011). New sheep centers emerged in the state during the 1880s. Rawlins, Rock Springs, and Laramie were early sites. Further north, Casper, Lander, and Buffalo became important centers by the late nineteenth century after they were connected to the railroad. In isolated Wyoming, a railroad was needed for a community to become a viable regional sheep center where wool and meat were shipped out (Wentworth 1948; Cassity 2011).

Sheep patterns in Texas changed during the 1880s and 1890s. South Texas continued to be a booming sheep region during the first half of the 1880s. Thereafter, the region declined in importance as a result of overgrazing and deteriorating ranges. Drought, cold weather, and the unchecked growth of mesquite exacerbated the problems. As a result of the degraded conditions, sheepmen moved their flocks northwest to the
Edwards Plateau and further west past the Big Bend. As the Texas sheep industry moved westward, San Antonio, rather than Corpus Christi, became the center of the Texas wool trade (Carlson 1982).

Not all states and territories saw an increase in sheep numbers during the 1880s and 1890s. While California saw its highest sheep numbers in 1880 (4.1 million), overall numbers declined shortly thereafter. Several formerly prominent sheep ranching areas (Monterey, Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara counties) saw a sharp decline in numbers as land values rose. In addition to rising land values, towns and farms expanded, decreasing the availability of land and water, as well as blocking traditional migration routes (Jelink 1998). By 1890, the majority of California counties experienced a decline in the numbers of sheep. A few notable exceptions were the counties of Kern and Tulare in the southern half of the San Joaquin Valley, and Tehama, with Red Bluff the county seat, in the northern part of the state. In these counties, sheep numbers increased by more than 10,000 (USBC 1880; 1890).

Western communities and landscapes felt the impact of the industry. Some communities along railroad routes became important shipping centers for wool and meat (Boag 1990). Sheep were trailed to the town corrals to be shipped out. Bars and hotels catered to shepherders and their seasonal cycles (Douglas and Bilbao 1975). Shearing stations were often set up close to the railroads. Herders led bands of sheep to the stations where their sheep were shorn and the wool hauled to a temporary wool warehouse situated adjacent to a rail line. From the warehouse, the wool was loaded onto railcars heading to larger central warehouses and markets in the East.
The West’s physical environment and its land use patterns were also impacted by millions of sheep grazing the ranges. Some stockmen settled in a location and grazed their bands of sheep along regular routes and rotations. Other sheepmen, however, relied on itinerant grazing, moving wherever there was grass. Their paths could take them hundreds of miles throughout the year. With little or no investment in a particular location, these sheepmen contributed heavily to overgrazing winter and summer ranges. Established sheepmen and cattlemen felt the impact of the itinerant grazers, which led to conflicts between them. Some cattlemen, especially small cattle ranchers, viewed all sheep ranchers negatively as they grazed the grass next to the cattle rancher’s holdings (Rowley 1985). While conflicts and violence were not present everywhere sheep and cattle grazed, Agnew (2017) cites Wyoming, parts of Texas, northern Arizona, Colorado, Oregon, and parts of New Mexico as regions where conflicts between shepherders and cattle ranchers developed. By the end of the 1880s because of overgrazing, competition between ranchers, and weather conditions, conservation of western ranges appeared to be a necessary need if ranching was to continue (Rowley 1985). The last decades of the nineteenth century were part of a dynamic period in the western sheep industry. Communities and landscapes were heavily impacted, and as more and more sheep entered the West, the region became “sheep country.” Indeed, the 1890s marked a new epoch in the United States sheep industry when its locus of power shifted from the East to the West (Wright 1910).
Entering the twentieth century, the western sheep industry continued its overall growth. More sheep were freely grazing lands on the public domain, which at times created animosity between those in the range sheep business and farmers and cattle ranchers (Rowley 1985). The industry was also becoming more complex and diverse. As sheep operators increased numbers, the entire system of raising sheep became more centralized and specialized. As specialization occurred, more stratification also occurred, from economic stratification to social and cultural stratification among the various ethnic laborers and their families (Cassity 2011). Immigrants were heavily involved in the industry, adding to the West’s and the industry’s cultural diversity. From owners to herders and shearers, those involved in various aspects of the sheep industry were a diverse group. For example, Norwegians, Mormons, Basques, Portuguese, Hispanics, and Mexicans were all part of the system of raising sheep, whether as herders, shearers, or owners.

During the twentieth century, the industry was continually evolving in all aspects of the business. Throughout the twentieth century, the federal government became increasingly involved through land management, wildlife protection, labor issues, and subsidies and price controls. Markets for meat and wool also changed after 1900. While the industry remained archaic in some ways, such as herders continuing to live with and care for sheep throughout the year, to stay profitable and in business, sheep ranchers had to adapt to keep up with changing circumstances and perspectives in land use strategies, markets, and environmental policies.
As the maps for 1900 and 1910 reveal, during the first decade of the twentieth century, almost no part of the American West was untouched by the sheep industry (Figure 2-7; Figure 2-8). Millions of sheep grazed the open ranges, small and large feeding operations fattened lambs, woolen mills opened to take advantage of the local and regional wool clips, and many communities across the West served sheepmen, wool buyers, and herders year round. Much of the West continued to be “sheep country” in the early twentieth century, and in many portions of the region, sheep outnumbered cattle (Rowley 1985).
Figure 2-7. 1900 Agricultural Census. Map by author (USBC 1900; Manson et al. 2017).
There were several contributing factors to the dominance of sheep over cattle in
the West. Mutton and wool prices were generally more stable than cattle prices. Sheep were hardier animals and could survive the western winters better (Rowley 1985).

Particularly after the harsh winter of 1886-87, stockmen took note of the better survival rate of sheep over cattle and many cattlemen turned to raising and investing in woolies instead of cattle (Malone et al. 1991).

With an abundance of sheep in the West, the textile industry looked to take advantage of the local wool, and the presence of woolen mills in the West parallels rising sheep numbers. In the early 1880s, woolen mills in the West were concentrated in California (13 mills), Utah (10 mills), and Oregon (5 mills). The Territories of Montana and Washington each had one woolen mill (Hittel 1882). By the twentieth century, however, using present state boundary lines, woolen mills were in operation in eight of the eleven western states (Dockham’s American Report 1903).

Woolen mills were built in communities of various sizes, from small towns such as Franklin, Idaho (population 435) to large cities such as San Francisco. The lifespan of the West’s woolen mills also fluctuated. Some of the mills stayed in business for decades, such as the Provo City Woolen Mills in Utah. Other smaller woolen mills found it more difficult to be profitable and only operated a few years, such as the Sweetgrass Woolen Mills in Big Timber, Montana. Whether in operation a few years or many years, or in a small community or a large city, woolen mills shaped western places both while in operation and also in later years. The woolen mills employed a variety of workers, from communities of nearby single, male Chinese laborers in San Jose (Baxter and Allen 2002) to both married and single men and women at the Pendleton Woolen Mills in Pendleton,
Sheep raising, particularly on public lands, became increasingly regulated in the early twentieth century. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the newly renamed and managed U.S. Forest Service became more heavily involved in regulating the bands of sheep grazing in the West’s forested regions and mountain meadows. Sheepherders traditionally moved their bands of sheep freely in search of good grass, and pastures on public lands were often free for the grazing. With the Forest Service regulating the summer ranges based on a land management system, fewer sheep were allowed to graze.
much of the West’s forested lands, and a fee was applied to each animal on the reserves. Stockmen across the West protested the grazing fees, especially when they were raised in subsequent years (Rowley 1985). Despite the protests, sheep movements were altered, and the creation of allotments left an enduring legacy on sheep ranching in the American West.

World War I also had dramatic impacts on the entire western industry. The war mentality included a "raise-more-sheep" campaign in addition to the fixing of wool prices, both of which had important consequences for the western sheep industry. The "raise-more-sheep" campaign began following the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 as the country became more concerned about preparedness. In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson's White House flock was "symbolic of the country's desire to increase wool and lamb production" (Carlson 1982, 192). Sheep numbers increased across the United States from 35.2 million in 1914 to 38.4 million in 1919 as sheep producers raised meat and wool for U.S. soldiers and the Allies.

The war also created demand for wool as the army and navy had contracts for outfitting their personnel. Prices for wool increased dramatically. Unwashed wool prices in Boston more than tripled from 22.8 cents per pound in 1914 to 69.6 cents per pound in 1917. Concerned about rising costs, the government, through the Council of Defense, established maximum prices. Despite fixing the prices, sheep numbers climbed with higher prices and a temporary, yet reliable, demand from the government (Carlson 1982). After the war, however, demand for meat and wool fell.
Sheep numbers in the eleven western states fell from approximately 28 million in 1910 to 18 million in 1920, and prices were low for sheepmen (USBC 1910; 1920). During World War I, the government had stockpiled wool, and when the huge quantities were released onto the market at the beginning of the decade, prices plummeted (Starrs and Goin 2010). While sheep numbers did not rebound to their previous highs, prices did recover, and sheep ranching remained important in the American West. A look at the “Armour’s Food Source Map” published in 1922 shows where sheep were most numerous in the United States (Figure 2-10). While there were a few small pockets in the eastern half of the United States, the West stands out as producing large numbers of sheep for lamb meat and mutton. The eleven western states all featured areas of significant sheep production in the early 1920s according to the food source map and figures in the Agricultural Censuses of 1920 and 1925.

Figure 2-10. “Armour's Food Source Map” highlights the prevalence of sheep raising in the American West (David Rumsey Historical Map Collection).
The western sheep industry in the 1930s and 1940s saw changes in land use patterns and an increase in scale of some parts of the industry. The general trend was decline through the Great Depression when ranchers across the West sold their sheep because of environmental and economic reasons. While overall numbers remained relatively high, tough economic times impacted numerous families across the West. Banks would not lend credit as freely as they had before (Kilker and Koch 1978). Feed prices were high and where ranges and pastures were in poor condition, ranchers had to either sell their sheep for low prices or move them temporarily to a new area (USBC 1935). For example, Beltran Paris (Paris and Douglass 1979) recalled the difficult circumstances of ranching in northeastern Nevada between 1930 and 1934. In 1934, his regular ranges were dry, so he and area ranchers shipped their sheep to Colorado ranges. They also had to sell some sheep to the government to buy essentials, such as groceries.

Land use patterns also changed during the 1930s, with much of it the result of government intervention. Dry environmental conditions led to increased worry about damage to the West’s landscapes. One solution was the elimination of hundreds of thousands of sheep from certain western ranges. The government purchased and slaughtered sheep across the West, from Wyoming to the Navajo Reservation, as part of the emergency livestock-purchasing program and livestock-reduction program (Weisiger 2009; Cassity 2011).

National-scale legislation was another solution to help the deteriorating western ranges. In 1934, the Taylor Grazing Act was passed. Although the public forest reserves had been regulated for several decades, there was still a vast amount of land in the public
domain that was outside of government regulation. Officials, established ranchers and farmers, and the general public were concerned with overgrazing and deteriorating land conditions in the West (Galbraith and Anderson 1971). Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act “to stop injury to public grazing lands by preventing over-grazing and soil deterioration, to provide for orderly use, improvement and development, and to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range” (Donahue 1999, 36). After its passage, new grazing districts were created on public land throughout the West that was not managed by the Forest Service. The act also required that individuals grazing livestock on these lands must be citizens of the United States and own private land. With these stipulations, tramp sheep bands that moved freely across western places with little regard to others occupying the land were effectively removed from western ranges. The era of itinerant grazing came to a close.

By the late 1930s and into the early 1940s, the industry again appeared vibrant (Figure 2-11; Figure 2-12). Sheep numbers were on the rise as a whole, and individuals with little means wanting to become involved in the industry could still find opportunities as they worked for shares to eventually own their own band of sheep. Sheep ranching had become established in certain western regions, and ranchers continued to adapt to their surroundings and circumstances.
Figure 2-11. 1930 Agricultural Census. Map by author (USBC 1930).
Figure 2-12. 1940 Agricultural Census. Map by author (USBC 1940).
Montana, Wyoming, the Snake River Plain of Idaho, and northeastern Oregon had considerably fewer sheep by 1940 than they did in the early part of century. As in the rest of the West, public lands were regulated. Forest rangers allowed fewer bands of sheep to graze the summer mountain ranges. Even though numbers had declined, these states were still considered principal sheep raising regions, producing large amounts of wool for the military and providing jobs to local and immigrant herders and to roving shearing gangs.

Another region of the West where sheep raising was still important was the Intermountain Region. The Intermountain Region included Utah, Nevada, and parts of Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Oregon. In the early 1940s, the raising of range sheep and the production of lambs and wool was one of the principal forms of agriculture in the region. Raising sheep comprised between 9 and 35 percent of total agricultural income in each of the states (Hochmuth et al. 1942).

During the late nineteenth century, California was a principal sheep raising state. By 1940, however, numbers had dropped considerably, from over four million sheep in 1880 to approximately 1.7 million sheep in 1940. Although overall numbers had declined, certain regions in the state remained involved in the sheep industry. The Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys were the leading sheep-producing areas of California with over 700,000 lambs produced annually. Not only were sheep raised in the valley, but the region was also a feeding area to fatten California, Oregon, and Nevada lambs (Mann 1936).

The 1930s and 1940s saw growth in other parts of the sheep industry including feeding and slaughtering (National Research Council 2008). The fattening of range
livestock in feedlots moved westward just as the prevalence of sheep moved to the open spaces and less expensive land. In the late nineteenth century, the Great Plains states of Nebraska and Kansas were deemed excellent feeding areas, as land was cheaper, the drier air meant fewer roofs were needed in the feedlots, and an adequate supply of feed was available nearby (Wentworth 1948). Later in the twentieth century, feeding areas appeared in other western regions, particularly where irrigation was used. State agricultural experiment stations investigated the best feeding rations for fattening lambs in particular locations. Newspapers across the West in the first few decades of the twentieth century dedicated print space to discussing the best and most profitable ways to fatten lambs, including using silage in Idaho (Caldwell Tribune 1920, 18 June), pea fields in Utah and the San Luis Valley (Estancia News 1906, 12 January; Salt Lake Tribune 1907, 1 May), alfalfa, small grains, and beet by-products in Montana’s Yellowstone Valley feedlots (Philipsburg Mail 1936, 17 January), and the proper rations of alfalfa with smaller amounts of corn, oats, and barley in northern Colorado (The Age 1910, 11 October).

By the early 1940s, feeding and fattening areas could be found spread out across the western and Great Plains states. The largest feedlots were found in Wyoming and Nebraska’s North Platte Valley, northern Colorado, and Colorado and Kansas’s Arkansas Valley, but each of the 17 western states had at least one area where lambs were fed and fattened (Figure 2-13) (Clawson 1950). Depending on the location, lambs were fed slightly different feeds in order to make the business the most profitable. For example, in parts of California’s Sacramento Valley, lambs grazed in fields of barley, beets, and hay,
while lambs in Missoula, Montana’s feeding areas fed primarily in fields of local sugar beets and alfalfa. Lambs in southern New Mexico ate alfalfa, sorghum, and cotton that were all produced in the region’s irrigated valleys. In eastern South Dakota and Nebraska more emphasis was placed on the locally grown corn and oats (Mann 1936).
Each of the feeding areas served a particular region. The smaller feeding areas, such as those found in the Pacific Northwest, fed lambs that were born and raised in a fairly close proximity to the feedlots. According to a 1936 article in *The Philipsburg Mail*, most of the lambs fed along the lower Yellowstone River Valley in Montana were acquired within a range of 150 miles (17 January). Feeding areas in the Sacramento Valley were slightly larger and fed lambs from a more extensive area, including Oregon, northern California, and Nevada. The largest feeding areas, such as northern Colorado, had an even wider range in which lambs were obtained. Sheepmen from Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, and Idaho sent their lambs to the Fort Collins, Fort Morgan, and Sterling districts to be fattened (Mann 1936).

Although lambs and sheep were fattened primarily in the western and Great Plains states, after butchering and processing, the end market of the majority of mutton and lamb meat was not local or even regional. Consumers living in northern and eastern cities demanded the most lamb and mutton in the United States (Newsom and Cross 1943). Secondary markets for meat were found along the Pacific Coast in cities such as Sacramento and Portland (Clawson 1950). There were local markets in the West, such as Basque settlements in Nevada, California, and Idaho, but the largest concentrations were found elsewhere.

**The Western Sheep Industry Since World War II**

World War II not only changed the world in profound ways, it impacted the American sheep industry. The sheep industry felt the effects of World War II soon after
Pearl Harbor. In 1942, more than 56 million head of sheep were being raised in the 50 states, the highest number recorded in U.S. history, but not U.S. western history. However, the effects of World War II including "raising less breeding stock; wearing more blends; liquidation of flocks as herders and ranchers entered the military; and discouraging civilians from using wool and eating lamb soon took a heavy toll on the industry" (Kilker and Koch 1978, 129).

The effects of World War II were not only immediate, but also long lasting. After World War II, sheep numbers experienced a steady decline as a result of several factors (Feuz 2016). When the United States entered World War II, many agricultural workers were called to duty or sought work in wartime related industries. In late 1942, Paul Etchepare, a Montana sheep rancher wrote, “Defense industries and attractive wages have taken the greater percentage of our ranch help” (Idarraga 2016, 220). Herders especially were difficult to find, and in range operations where sheep were still trailed hundreds of miles along a designated route, a competent herder was vital. With domestic herders unavailable, ranch owners relied on foreign laborers, but they, too, were also difficult to find partly as a result of immigration quotas from the 1924 National Origins Act that made it difficult to hire new foreign herders (Echeverria 1999; Idarraga 2016). Sheep ranchers in western states such as Nevada and Wyoming turned to their representatives in Congress including Senator Patrick McCarran (NV) and Senator Lester Hunt (WY) to help them bring in foreign herders both during the war and after, particularly the Basques. Between 1950 and 1952, legislation was passed allowing additional immigration visas for shepherders. The legislation that was initially passed on June 30, 1950 became known as
the “Sheepherder’s Bill” (Echeverria 1999). The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, further increased the number of skilled shepherders, many of whom were Basques (Idarraga 2016).

While federal bills helped the sheep industry, the overall decline of agricultural workers after the war continued to hurt the industry. After returning from war, a number of men chose not to return to a life on the ranch or farm. Those who did remain in agriculture tended to turn to less-demanding aspects of agriculture, such as raising crops or cattle rather than sheep (Kilker and Koch 1978). Raising sheep is a labor-intensive activity requiring herders year round, skilled sheep shearers, and extra help during busy times such as lambing, docking and castrating of lambs, and shipping of lambs during the fall to feedlots or processing plants.

In addition to supply of labor, several other factors have been cited for the decline of the sheep industry since the mid-twentieth century. These include a diversified diet and competition from other meats, such as poultry and pork resulting in the transformation of dietary customs (Feuz 2016; Idarraga 2016). Competition from imports from Australia and New Zealand increased steadily (Jones 2004). Increased federal land regulations after World War II made it difficult for some ranchers to remain in the business (Idarraga 2016). Prolonged drought also continued to be a factor, particularly in the West where many ranchers relied on federal and state lands, as public grazing allotments changed depending on the conditions of the land (Jones 2004; Sheridan 2007; West 2011). For many, sheep ranching was simply not as profitable after World War II; low prices and less demand for wool combined with higher costs of operating deterred some sheep
ranchers from continuing in the business (Jones 2004; National Research Council 2008). Lamb and wool operators found the business to be no longer economically viable and many began to liquidate their flocks.

The woolen industry also experienced changes post-World War II. During the war, the United States government had contracts with the woolen mills to produce military apparel and blankets (Polasek 1962). After the war, with fewer sheep in the United States and a declining interest in raising sheep for wool, foreign wool imports increased. The post-World War II era also saw the rise of less expensive synthetic fibers such as nylon, polyester, and acrylic, and consumers began to accept and prefer synthetic fibers instead of wool (Jones 2004). With less demand from consumers and the disappearance of large wartime contracts, woolen mills across the West found it more difficult to compete, and their numbers also declined. Some mills closed their doors immediately after the war, such as the Humboldt Bay Woolen Mills in Eureka, California (Heald et al. 2003). Portland Woolen Mills was able to make profits after the war, but eventually closed in 1960, citing increased production costs from foreign competition as reason for its closure (The Oregonian 1960 October 16). While some woolen mills in the Midwest and the East continued to operate, by the end of the twentieth century, Pendleton Woolen Mills was the only large-scale woolen mill still in operation in the West.

According to the Census of Agriculture, between 1940 and 1978, sheep numbers in the eleven western states declined from approximately 17 million head in 1940 to just under 6 million head in 1978 (Figure 2-14). Despite sheep numbers declining across much of the American West, sheep ranching was still important in localized areas
through the 1970s. Where sheep ranching remained, such as the southern half of Idaho, central Utah, parts of Wyoming, and western Colorado, it was an established industry and part of the social character of the communities. Local newspapers in localities such as Elko, Nevada, Big Timber, Montana, Craig, Colorado, and Hailey, Idaho covered wool and lamb prices and seasonal sheep activities such as shearing, shipping, and trailing of sheep from winter pastures to summer ranges. State Wool Growers’ Associations maintained enough members to hold regular meetings to discuss issues pertinent to the industry.
Figure 2-14. 1978 Agricultural Census. Map by author (USBC 1978).
The sheep industry experienced another significant downturn in the mid-1970s (Jones 2004). A number of similar factors continued to impact the industry, including labor shortages and rising labor costs, competition from other sources of fiber with the rise of synthetic fibers, predation losses particularly from coyotes, and the growth of foreign competition (Gee et al. 1977). The 1970s also saw lamb and mutton consumption continue its decline, and additionally, the wool market experienced a collapse (Skaggs 1986). Further, changing environmental perceptions and priorities among the public and government agencies impacted western sheep ranchers.

The 1970s also was a period of heightened environmental awareness in the United States. The debate between proponents and opponents of public grazing, both sheep and cattle, became highly polarized during the period, and in many instances remains a contentious issue today (Starrs 2002). Several environmental laws also were passed in the 1970s, including the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The law protects species and ecosystems that are threatened or endangered with extinction. When an animal or plant is listed as either “threatened” or “endangered,” ranchers are impacted as it changes the way they are allowed to graze their animals on the land where the listed animal or plant is vulnerable. In 1974, gray wolves were first listed as endangered, and in 1975, the grizzly bear was added to the “threatened” list (Bangs et al. 2001; NRCS 2011). Although sheep ranchers did not heavily feel the impact immediately, as wolf and bear populations slowly increased, ranchers were faced with new predation obstacles. Wolves were the greater threat, and after gray wolves were reintroduced into the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in 1995, packs spread to other parts of the West, including western Montana, Wyoming,
Idaho, Oregon, and Washington (Bangs et al. 2001). By the twenty-first century, some sheep ranchers across the northern half of the West began losing sheep to the wolves on both public and private lands (Helena Independent Record 2009, August 28; Teton Valley News 2013, August 19; The Spokesman Review 2014, August 15). Along with animal rights and wilderness designations, many ranchers cite the Endangered Species Act as a threat to the future of western ranching (Huntsinger 2002).

In the mid-1990s, the sheep industry experienced another setback when the National Wool Act was terminated (Jones 2004). The Act was repealed in 1995 after being in place since 1954 (National Research Council 2008). Congress passed the National Wool Act in 1954 to help sustain the industry. During the 1950s and 1960s, synthetic fibers became more common and less expensive for mills and consumers. The demand for wool products, such as clothing and blankets, fell. The government, however, recognized wool to be “an essential and strategic commodity” (Parker and Pope 1983, 79). Therefore, they passed the National Wool Act putting tariffs on imported wool. The tariffs collected were then distributed to sheep producers on the wool they sold. The American Sheep Producers Council, today known as the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), also collected a small amount of the tariff money that was to be used for the national promotion of lamb and wool as well as educational activities. When the government supported wool program was terminated over a period between 1995 and 2001, it impacted the entire sheep industry. Sheep numbers declined again as ranchers accustomed to receiving higher prices for their wool were now receiving considerably less (Jones 2004). Further, the ASI had been receiving the majority of its funding through
the tariffs. With the act repealed, the ASI lost much of its funding (Thomas and Miller 2001). Despite the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 that resumed some support for wool and mohair, the sheep industry continued its decline (Jones 2004).

Sheep numbers continue to fluctuate slightly year to year and within state boundaries (Figure 2-15). In 2016, Nevada, Wyoming, California, and New Mexico saw an increase in breeding ewes. Oregon and Montana maintained their breeding ewe numbers, while Utah, Colorado, and Idaho experienced a decline (Shiflett 2017). Overall, however, the western sheep industry in the twenty-first century has slowed its decline compared to the period between World War II and the 1970s. To remain in business, many producers and marketers are relying fully or partly on niche markets for their lamb and mutton, wool, and dairy products (USDA 2011). Other aspects of the industry, such as fattening and feeding, and outside forces including shifting environmental perceptions and priorities, also continue to shape the West’s modern sheep industry.
Figure 2-15. 2012 Agricultural Census. Map by author (USBC 2012).
One aspect of the industry that continues to be heavily researched, as well as more concentrated, is that of fattening lambs for slaughter. The feeding and fattening of lambs is highly centralized. The 2012 map from the Census of Agriculture shows where the various kinds of feedlots are concentrated. The largest western concentrations are found in Colorado feedlots and fields in California. Concentrated feeding areas also occur in parts of western Oregon, such as the Willamette Valley, and in the Great Plains states of South Dakota and Texas (National Research Council 2008). The trend toward large feedlots began to accelerate post-World War II, and as feedlots became larger, farmers, ranchers, and smaller feeding operations found it increasingly difficult to compete with them (Bragdon 1980; Skaggs 1986). Feedlots were an important part of Colorado’s economy in the early twentieth century, and as the twentieth century progressed, Colorado feedlots continued to grow (Colorado Agricultural Experiment Station 1916; Newsom and Cross 1943). Bragdon (1980) cites Colorado’s proximity to feeding supplies and favorable climatic conditions for lamb feeding as reasons for the dominance of Colorado as a feedlot destination. Most of the large lamb feedlots are found in north central Colorado between Greeley and Fort Collins. In 2016, Colorado has some of the largest sheep feedlots in the United States with the ability to feed between 25,000 and 100,000 sheep at a time in certain feedlots (National Research Council 2008). The lambs are shipped on trucks, rather than railroads, to the feedlots from ranches and sale barns throughout the West. Once they arrive at the commercial feedlots, they fatten on concentrations of grains and harvest forage before they are shipped to a processing plant (National Research Council 2008).
In recent decades, California has seen an increase in the number of lambs fed in the state (Bastian and Whipple 1998). While there are dry feedlots in California that are similar to feedlots in Colorado, California also has forage-feeding operations. Rather than mixing corn and other grains with harvested forages, California forage-feeding operations consist of open fields containing grass hay, legumes, rye, Kentucky bluegrass seed, and other cool-season crops. Large-scale feeding operations of this variety are concentrated in California’s San Joaquin Valley and the Imperial Valley (National Research Council 2008). Some lambs are finished with forage-feeding, while others are still sent to dry feedlots later in the year to be ready for slaughter around Easter when there is more consumer demand (Shiflett 2015).

After lambs are fattened and processed, they are consumed. Lamb consumption in the United States has declined overall since World War II. The location of the largest numbers of consumers, however, has changed very little. The largest consumers of lamb continue to be located in cities in the East and Northeast, with smaller numbers consuming lamb in western cities; less lamb is consumed in the South and Great Plains states (Clawson 1950; Bastian and Whipple 1998; National Research Council 2008). Local niche markets for lamb, however, are increasing across western communities. The growth of farmers’ markets, the local food movement, and organic products benefit sheep producers as they sell their lamb to more local and regional markets (Runyon 2013).

A recent trend in lamb consumption is the growth of direct marketing. Western lamb producers of various sizes are becoming more involved with selling their meat directly to consumers, foodservice operators, and local and regional grocery stores
(National Research Council 2008). Producers market their lamb through farmers’ markets or websites, such as localharvest.org that provides a directory for consumers looking to connect with producers directly. Some ranchers have their own personal websites where consumers can order meat online directly from the ranch. In a study of direct marketers, researchers found that “people are really being ingenious. They are making their own paths in order to sell their products” (Loos 2014, 19).

Although not limited to those engaged in direct marketing, a growing niche market for lamb is organically raised lamb. Producers raising and marketing their lamb as certified organic has grown considerably in the twenty-first century. In the Department of Agriculture’s 2008 Organic Survey, Colorado was shown to have the largest organic lamb and sheep inventory in the United States (Brester 2012). By the 2014 survey, Colorado’s inventory declined, and California, Oregon, Washington, and Montana held the largest organic inventories (USDA 2016).

Other producers do not raise certified organic lamb, but rather market their products as “locally grown” or “grass-fed” and compete for some of the same consumers. Consumers are becoming more interested in what they eat and where it comes from, and this trend is reflected in restaurant menus. In 2014, one of the top three restaurant menu trends included locally sourced meat (Shiflett 2014). For example, three restaurants in Yellowstone National Park serve lamb purchased from Montana Natural Lamb, a cooperative of three lamb producers near Big Timber, Montana. Jim McCaleb, general manager of Yellowstone National Park Lodges, said “…we know that we are not only contributing to the health of our guests, we are also contributing to a healthier planet by
supporting local farmers and food systems” (Partain 2016, 16). While some lamb producers sell their “grass-fed” or “local” meat to restaurants, other producers sell directly to grocery stores. The Swallow Fork Ranch in Colorado sells their free range lambs to Whole Foods (Queck-Matzie 2015). The direct marketing from producers to restaurants and grocery stores has helped not only the public have more access to local lamb that can help foster a more positive public image of the meat, but it adds another market for sheep producers in a changing industry.

Immigrant populations have created an additional niche market for lamb, and lamb producers have turned to catering to the various ethnic markets, including local and regional populations in the West (Runyon 2013). Some ethnic groups that have settled in the United States continue to consume lamb, particularly those from the Middle East, North Africa, the Caribbean, southern Europe, and Mexico (National Research Council 2008). Religious groups, such as those of the Jewish faith, Greek and Eastern Orthodox groups, and Muslims prefer lamb for not only certain holidays and celebrations, but for everyday meals. Some ranchers in Colorado found that marketing their leaner lambs to Muslim and Mexican communities provides the ranchers with a more sustainable market and is more profitable than the traditional American markets where the lambs are fed more and consequently fatter (Runyon 2015). Ethnic grocery stores buy lean, young lamb from lamb buyers throughout the year, not just at Easter. While this market is smaller overall compared to traditional ways of fattening lambs, some ranchers and marketers predict “the way ranchers raise sheep will need to change” as marketing lamb to ethnic
Western sheep ranchers in the twenty-first century have had to adapt to stay in the business and remain a profitable enterprise. Meat and wool have long been the primary reasons people raise sheep. As niche markets for both of those products increase, sheep producers are finding new outlets for not only their “locally grown” meat, but also for their wool. One such niche includes smaller-scale artists creating woolen goods. With growing interest among artists and consumers in the utilization of wool, fiber festivals have become annual events across the West. Fiber festivals have been growing in the western United States in the twenty-first century, and they provide a meeting ground where artists and consumers can gather and learn about wool and techniques as well as buy woolen products. The festivals reflect a growing interest in different types of wool from various sheep breeds including the churro sheep, hair sheep, and more traditional breeds. At the festivals, events are held, such as a marketplace for vendors who work with wool, fiber competitions, and presentations and workshops. Education is a primary aspect of the festivals. Novice and advanced fiber artists can find workshops suitable to their skills. Examples of workshop topics from the 2017 Big Sky Fiber Festival include beginners spinning, felting, eco printing, and advanced drop spindle plying (Big Sky Fiber Festival 2017). At the California Wool and Fiber Festival, many vendors also offer demonstrations for those with no experience working with fiber as well as those who may want to learn a new technique (California Wool and Fiber Festival 2017).
Wool producers, Wool Growers Associations, and marketers are also optimistic about the future of wool. With increased consumer appreciation and awareness on the source of products, some businessmen and women have found woolen clothing and products to be a growing market. Voormi is a company based in Pagosa Springs, Colorado. The company focuses on outdoor gear and apparel, much of which is made from wool that is sourced “from the local high elevation growing regions of the Rocky Mountains” (Voormi 2017). Duckworth is another western company that markets their woolen products as entirely made on American soil. They, too, focus on the source of the wool, stating, “We’ve created an entire range of products from one sheep ranch [in Montana]” (Holden 2014, 12). The company not only markets the wool as locally sourced, but they aim to tell the wool’s local story by documenting the shearing, trailing, grazing, and everyday life of sheep ranchers on their website and social media sites (Duckworth 2017).

Small-scale western woolen mills also emerged in the twenty-first century, catering towards a niche market. These mills consist of consumers who value “customized, quality workmanship on a wide spectrum of fiber types; one stop for the full sequence of processing; a…commitment to renewable energy (solar hot water and wool-drying), non-petroleum-based scouring, and participation in a decentralized, rural economy that celebrates the potential of what grass can grow” (Thirteen Mile Lamb and Wool Company 2017). In 2007, Mountain Meadow Wool opened in Buffalo, Wyoming. Their mission is to “support local ranchers and raise awareness about the ranching culture in the American West” (Mountain Meadow Wool 2017). Like companies such as Voormi
and Duckworth, these smaller mills use neolocalism in their marketing, promoting themselves and their mission as not only eco-friendly, but locally sourced and manufactured. The stories each company and business use focus on “creating a narrative of place” where consumers are active participants of each company’s mission statement (Schnell 2013, 83).

Sheep ranchers in the twenty-first century are not only adapting to changing marketing and sales of meat and wool, but they also must continue to adapt to current environmental and wildlife issues. Continuing from the 1960s and 1970s, environmental perceptions and environmental priorities among the public and government agencies remains an issue impacting western sheep ranchers. Predator concerns, particularly wolves, is still an issue for western ranchers grazing their sheep on both public and private lands (Sheep Industry News 2015). In the twenty-first century, some ranchers are also feeling the impact of concerns over the impacts that domestic sheep might have on bighorn sheep and sage grouse. Regarding bighorn sheep, the biggest concern is the occurrence and impact of diseases transferring from domestic sheep to bighorn sheep (Heinse et al. 2016). The American Sheep Industry lists discussions of bighorn sheep and domestic sheep as priority issues for 2017. Ranchers who graze their sheep in sagebrush-covered areas, such as parts of Nevada and Wyoming, are also part of ongoing research and discussions between scientists, policy makers, environmental groups, and educators that are exploring the impact of grazing on sage-grouse habitat (Boyd et al. 2014). Sheep Industry News, the journal published by the American Sheep Industry, covers pertinent issues to sheep producers, and sage grouse and bighorn sheep are common topics.
The western sheep industry continues to evolve. Some individuals and families have carried on the tradition of raising sheep in the same place over generations, but it has taken a willingness to adapt to changing national and global circumstances, to work with a variety of groups, agencies, and policy makers, and to educate one’s self in changing markets and range science. In the twenty-first century, the American West is no longer thought of as “sheep country.” The practice of raising sheep, consuming lamb meat, and working with wool, however, has not only left an enduring legacy in places, but it continues to shape certain localities across the West.
CHAPTER 3 – SWEET GRASS COUNTY, MONTANA

Walking down McLeod Avenue in Big Timber, Montana on a sunny and windy November afternoon in 2012, Marc King, Sweet Grass County Extension Agent, commented, “Big Timber, Montana was built on the sheep industry” (personal communication, November 2012). Similar statements were echoed by other Big Timber residents, new and old. Ben Marsh (1987) defined place identity as the story a town tells itself, or its autogeography. “What is this town? How did we get here? Why do we stay?” are a few of the questions Marsh suggested to ask when exploring a town’s identity (1987, 338). New and old residents of Big Timber answer Marsh’s first two questions with similar statements to King’s, such as, “This was sheep country,” or “The majority of ranches in Sweet Grass County were bought and paid for with sheep and wool,” and most common is, “Big Timber was once the nation’s largest wool shipping point.” Many of the residents are aware of Big Timber’s past and acknowledge the community’s economic foundation. When a large pool of the community agrees on the answers to Marsh’s questions, a strong place identity is the result (Bryson 2006).

Big Timber has not experienced the mass exodus of people that have plagued many other rural communities across the West and Midwest. Since 1955, its population has hovered close to 1,600 full-time residents. Although Sweet Grass County is home to mining endeavors, the town of Big Timber has not experienced a significant influx of outsiders for economic purposes such as gas and oil or additional new industries. With a relatively stable population, much of the community agrees on Big Timber’s autogeography, part of which involves its foundation as sheep country.
Historically, the identity of the Sweet Grass community and the majority of its individuals were rooted in sheep influences. Daily patterns brought residents in contact with different aspects of the sheep business, whether it was ranching, herding, shearing, lambing, caring for bum lambs, loading wool, or being stopped on the road while sheep were trailed to the next grazing ground. This influence, however, has waned. Although Sweet Grass is still ranching country, cattle operations are much more prevalent than sheep ranches. Even with the change in livestock specialization, the ranching character of the place remains, and the community is still “connected by love of the land, memories of past generations, a strong work ethic, and a willingness to neighbor” (Grosskopf and Morrison 2009, 159). With continued ranching and working of the land, social memories, a community cohesiveness, and an awareness and promotion of their sheeping heritage, Sweet Grass County retains a place identity associated with its sheep ranching foundation and continued traditions.

**Sweet Grass County Sheep History**

The early bands of sheep into Sweet Grass arrived from Red Bluff, California and Oregon via sheep trailing routes (Wentworth 1948). It took several months for the sheepmen to lead the sheep across Nevada and Idaho. Settlers, or just those “floating” their sheep through available grazing lands, saw present-day Sweet Grass County as an ideal region to graze sheep and cattle. It offered plenty of clear perennial streams, an abundance of grass, and mountains nearby that offered high basin meadows for summer grazing (Figure 3-1). Settlement in present day Sweet Grass County did not accelerate
until after 1882 when the Crow Indian Reservation was reduced in size and new lands were opened to Euro-American settlement (Smith, P. 2002). When the Northern Pacific Railroad reached Big Timber and established a shipping point later in 1882, settlement accelerated further. The railroad brought in new settlers, many of whom turned to sheep ranching to make a living as there was demand for wool, relatively low start-up costs, and a shipping point at Big Timber where they could ship their products and sell wool and meat to eastern markets.
Figure 3-1. Sweet Grass County, Montana. Map by author.

Early settlers came from the Midwest states, such as Illinois, Minnesota, and
South Dakota among others, and from as far away as Norway and Scotland (USBC 1900b). A large number of Norwegian families traveled from Minnesota together to start a Norwegian settlement near present day Melville in the northern part of Sweet Grass County close to the Crazy Mountains (Pioneer Society of Sweet Grass County 1960). Other Norwegian families scattered throughout the county. Many of the Norwegian families became involved in the sheep business whether they had experience with sheep or not. Sweet Grass sheep rancher Kevin Halverson, said, “You opened up the phone book and every Norwegian family in there had a band of sheep” (personal communication, September 2013). It was relatively easy to become involved in the sheep business, especially if a family was already settled on a ranch. Chain migration resulted in brothers, cousins, and uncles migrating to the area and readily finding jobs herding or camptending for relatives already settled in the area. Some men got their start in the sheep business by working on shares. If an individual did not have much money, they could grow their flock by working on shares for larger, established ranches in the area. Working on shares was a way for people to work and learn about the seasonal cycles of sheep ranching, such as wintering, shearing, lambing, and herding before they ran their own operation. They were then “paid” with lambs or ewes to start their own band of sheep. This system was beneficial to the owners as they did not have to pay workers out-of-pocket. According to local histories, many Sweet Grass families grew their sheep ranching businesses under this system (Pioneer Society of Sweet Grass County 1960).

The Sweet Grass sheep industry accelerated rapidly in the late 1800s through the early 1900s. The industry was a significant part of the county and shaped the place
considerably. For example, when a group gathered to discuss area road maintenance, the fact that “Big Timber was the nearest and best wool market” played a part in the discussion of maintaining particular roads to the shearing pens (MSU, 1898). Sheep ranching reached its peak at the turn of the twentieth century with over 400,000 sheep in the county (USBC 1900a). The high demand for wool, efficient transportation networks, an abundant grazing environment, and the open range era all contributed to the numerous bands of sheep.

Soon after the turn of the century, however, homesteaders, more regulations, and temporarily, World War I all impacted the Sweet Grass sheep industry. As homesteaders started calling Sweet Grass County home, they helped put an end to the open range in the region (Malone et al. 1991). The Big Timber newspaper provided a visual of the changing landscape as homesteaders settled the area when they printed, “houses are to be seen where only a few months ago no sign of human habitation was visible” (Big Timber Pioneer 1910, 12 May, 1). Sheepmen felt the impact of the “contraction of the range” and overall, they saw their sheep numbers decrease (Big Timber Pioneer 1911, 7 December, 1).

New regulations from the federal government in the early twentieth century also impacted the local sheep industry. In 1905, the newly renamed U.S. Forest Service became more heavily involved in regulating the bands of sheep grazing in the high country. Almost immediately, conflicts arose and would continue to grow between the National Forest and Sweet Grass sheep ranchers and herders (Smith, P. 2002). Sheepherders were used to moving their bands of sheep wherever and whenever they
pleased in search of fine grass. With the Forest Service regulating the summer ranges, fewer sheep were allowed to graze, especially if drought impacted the region. Ultimately, as the decades passed, in order to protect the ranges, the Forest Service allowed fewer and fewer bands of sheep to trail up the Boulder Valley to the high country. In 1913, they legally allowed and counted 23 bands, or approximately 90,000 sheep to graze the Absaroka and Beartooth mountain ranges. In 1973, forest rangers allowed only four bands, or approximately 6,000 sheep to graze in the same area (Smith, P. 2002). In 2003, the Allestad family of Big Timber trailed the last band of sheep up the Boulder to the now Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness.

During World War I, the federal government enacted a national “raise-more-sheep” campaign that impacted Sweet Grass County sheep producers. Sheep numbers rose when wool prices were high. After the war, prices plummeted to pre-war levels. Most manufacturers had extra wool still available, making a market for new wool almost nil (Clawson 1950). Sweet Grass County also experienced a drought post-WWI that caused winter feed prices to increase and overall sheep numbers to decline temporarily.

Compared to sheep numbers of the late 1800s and early 1900s, the number of sheep continued to decline as the twentieth century progressed. As markets, policies, and weather cooperated, however, spikes did occur. The last and most significant downturn in the industry came after World War II. Knowledgeable labor became more difficult to find. Many families sold their sheep and started raising cattle, which were less labor intensive (Pioneer Society of Sweet Grass County 1980). The demand for wool plummeted as well with the rise of nylon and other synthetic fibers. It was no longer as
profitable to raise sheep. In addition to labor issues and decreased demand for wool, according to Clayton Marlow, a Montana range management specialist, abusive grazing practices caught up with sheep ranchers throughout Montana during the 1949-1950 drought (personal communication, November 15, 2012). The dry conditions, lack of knowledgeable laborers, rising costs, and lower prices were all factors in families leaving the sheep ranching business.

The 1970s brought more issues that continued to hurt the Sweet Grass sheep industry. The rise of the environmental movement meant more eyes on grazing practices and wildlife. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 protected predators such as wolves and grizzly bears. When wolves were reintroduced to the area in the mid-1990s, Sweet Grass ranchers became more concerned. The protection and reintroduction eventually resulted in predation issues, and ranchers trailing their sheep into the high country reported more problems. With time and the population boom of wolves, even ranchers grazing sheep in their lower pastures began to reportedly encounter problems (Big Timber Pioneer 2005, 21-27 January; 2007, 22-28 June). With mounting issues plaguing sheep ranchers, many decided to sell their livestock and find new ventures, either in cattle ranching, city jobs, or retirement. Sweet Grass County, once home to hundreds of thousands of sheep in 1900, contained only about 4,400 sheep in 2017 (USBC 1900a; USDA-NASS 2017) (Figure 3-2).
The Sweet Grass sheeping landscape is a subtle landscape with quiet features. It is not exotic, but rather an everyday, working landscape. It is also a landscape created by a community with an appreciation of the past and recognition of the labor involved. To see it in all its details requires one to abandon the interstate and take a few gravel roads, explore the streets of Big Timber, get out of the car and walk around a bit, and most of all, to keep eyes, as well as ears, open, as residents are willing and eager to talk about their home and what makes it special.

The cultural landscape reveals a great deal about a community. Peirce Lewis (1979a, 12) called the human landscape “our unwitting autobiography.” The Big Timber landscape reflects the past, or the community’s biography. Indicators of a sheeping past
include buildings, such as the wool house as well as stately buildings built with money made from sheep. Fences built to contain sheep still line pastures whether or not sheep graze the grasses inside of them. Traditional shepherder wagons, both derelict and refinshed, sit along the streets of Big Timber or in ranch yards. More recent additions to the Sweet Grass landscape serve to commemorate the sheepeing past, such as forms of art and a formal monument. These public landscape features suggesting the community’s historical connections with sheep continue to give the character of the place an identity forged by the past.

In addition to the visible landscape, invisible landscapes give character to the place. Invisible landscapes, comprised of people’s memories, usage, and experiences that occurred in particular places, give added depth and meaning to the tangible landscape (Ryden 1993). When people, such as those involved in the Sweet Grass County sheep industry, have shared invisible landscapes related to activities in a particular place, their memories contribute details to the local and regional sheep narrative, giving it more value and meaning. Many sheep-related memories, while personal and unique, are shared amongst residents and help to shape the area’s place identity.

**Vernacular, Working Landscapes**

While the practice of raising sheep has had to adapt to today’s political, social, and economic environment, it remains in some ways a traditional, archaic activity. The landscape reflects the old traditions and the more contemporary adaptations. The working landscape of sheep fences, lambing sheds, and shepherder wagons that dominated the area’s sheepeing past is still visible, serving as a reminder of the county’s once-thriving
sheep industry. In some cases, the features remain functional. Woven-wire sheep fences contain animals, sometimes sheep, other times cattle. Lambing sheds continue to provide shelter for ewes and lambs or they might be used for storage if sheep are no longer raised on the ranch. Antiquated sheepherder wagons make appearances in parades or have been converted to lodging for guests. Today’s “sheepherder wagons” are more difficult to discern as they are usually modern-day campers. Infrastructure, such as fences, housing, and sheds, is important for a ranching operation to be successful over the long term. To sustain such everyday features requires not only hard work, but also capital. As the sheep industry declined and became less profitable, some of the sheep infrastructure also declined as it became too expensive to repair or build new structures. Whether the features continue to deteriorate or remain in use, they are part of a past and present vernacular sheep ranching landscape.

Fencing related to sheep grazing has been an enduring key element of the vernacular ranching landscape. Even some of Sweet Grass County’s earliest sheepmen utilized fencing, mostly in the form of corrals. Ranchers built wooden corrals near the home ranch to bring the sheep in at night during the winter months. They did not need large areas of fenced pastures, as the dominant form of the practice was to utilize the open range and graze sheep freely across the public domain. Before 1882, some ranchers trailed their sheep to Glendive, Montana where a railroad shipping point could bring the sheep and wool to markets further east. In the two volumes of Pioneer Memories (1960; 1980), reminiscences by local ranchers A.M. Grosfield, Charles McDonnell, and Edward Veasey included memories of herding ewes and wethers to Glendive where the wethers
were shipped off for meat and the ewes were trailed back home, grazing the entire way. After the Northern Pacific Railroad established a shipping point in Big Timber, some ranchers continued to herd sheep to Glendive, in part, to fully utilize the open range in that part of the territory during the spring and summer months. The land closer to home that they owned or that was leased from the government was then saved and used during the winter and fall (Pioneer Society of Sweet Grass County 1960).

As changes in population, government policies, land ownership, and sheep farming practices occurred, more land was fenced to keep sheep in specific confined areas primarily during the winter. The Big Timber Pioneer reported area ranchers fencing off areas before the turn of the twentieth century (1898, 14 July). When Sweet Grass ranchers began to feel the threat of the Forest Reserves regulating and limiting the number of sheep that could be grazed in the summer mountains, the Big Timber Pioneer printed an article on ways to make sheep ranching profitable without grazing them on public lands. They cited research that showed that grazing sheep in alfalfa fields protected by woven wire fences could be profitable (1904, 26 May). The local newspaper published other articles that highlighted the positive results of using woven wire fences, such as its effectiveness in predator control and lower costs for herders (Big Timber Pioneer 1908, 27 August). Newspaper advertisements for woven wire fencing appeared in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century (1895, 29 November; 1909, 4 March). More fences were needed as homesteaders moved into the region in the early twentieth century. Ranches for sale used the number of acres fenced and livestock wintered as selling points. One bordering the Yellowstone River just outside of Big
Timber boasted of having 810 acres, all fenced with woven wire, and capable of wintering 5,000 sheep and 80 head of horses and cattle (Big Timber Pioneer 1920, 6 May). By the time the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act passed, fences, from woven wire enclosures to wooden corrals were common in Sweet Grass. Today, woven-wire sheep fences can be seen parallel to many state and county roads in Sweet Grass County (Figure 3-3). Some of them even continue to keep sheep contained. Many, however, are reminders of the past. Elaine Allestad said, “It’s fun to go to see ranches with this old woven wire because you know there were sheep there” (personal communication, July 10, 2013).

![Figure 3-3. Woven-wire fences keep sheep in pastures. The barbed wire on top is not always present on fenced sheep pastures. Photo by author, November 2, 2012.](image)

Sheds constructed for lambing have been another discernable element of the
vernacular landscape. Lambing techniques have changed in Sweet Grass County from “drop” lambing to shed lambing. Shed lambing has left a more lasting imprint on the landscape. Drop lambing does not require any permanent structures as ewes lamb out in the open, while shed lambing requires the construction of long buildings with many “jugs,” or separate pens, inside where ewes and their lambs form a bond (Figure 3-4).

The earliest sheepmen lambed on the open range where ewes lambed out in the open on green grass. The band continues to move, leaving behind small bunches of ewes and lambs. With this method, spring snow storms or heavy rains were at times detrimental to the rancher. In 1903, when local rancher Jacob Hoyem experimented with early lambing in large sheds, many of the other ranchers predicted it would be a disaster (Big Timber Pioneer 1903, 12 March). It proved successful. In the following years, articles and advertisements in the Big Timber Pioneer indicate that Sweet Grass ranchers commonly used sheds to lamb (1908, 11 June; 1910, 4 October; 1916, 13 April; 1935, 29 August). Similar to fenced pastures, sheep sheds were selling points for ranches on the market (Big Timber Pioneer 1920, 10 June). While ranchers would sometimes go back to drop lambing, lambing sheds remained on the landscape (Figure 3-5). No matter where, lambing is a difficult job. Lambing has been described as “the worst work of all…when…for weeks neither day nor night is there rest for the men who work in the lambing herds” (Big Timber Pioneer 1901, 7 September, 6). Lambing sheds reflect that sheep landscapes are indeed “the product of much sweat, and hardship” (Jackson 1997, 343).
Figure 3-4. Lambing “jugs” where a ewe and her new lamb are kept until bonded. Photo by author, April 4, 2013.

Figure 3-5. Lambing sheds help protect lambs from weather and predators. Photo by author, April 4, 2013.
Mobile shelters for herders are another traditional part of the sheeeping landscape. Sweet Grass County herders have lived in various structures over the past century while out on the range. Some herders in the earliest days used tents as shelter regardless of the terrain. More commonly, however, when not in the mountainous terrain, herders called the sheep wagon home (Figure 3-6). The sheeherder’s wagon was a durable unit built to travel long distances over fairly rugged terrain. The compact unit included all a herder needed, including a stove to cook on and for warmth, a table, a bed, and storage for supplies (Weidel 2001). It was an efficient unit that was utilized by herders in Sweet Grass County and across the American West. As the sheep industry changed, housing for labor did as well. Modern house trailers and campers became more common (Figure 3-7). No longer pulled by horse, the campers were moved by vehicle. Compared to the traditional sheeherder’s wagon, modern units have refrigerators, gas stoves and heaters, and many times battery-operated televisions. With the decline of large numbers of sheep ranches throughout the American West, the traditional sheeherder’s wagon has become an iconic, often romanticized, symbol of the lone sheeherder living a simple life out on the range watching over the band of sheep. In Big Timber, old wagons are featured in local parades and decorate front lawns and side streets. They are no longer a part of today’s working landscape, but instead reminders of the past when sheep thrived throughout Sweet Grass County.
Figure 3-6. A Montana sheepherder living in a wagon while herding sheep on the range (Huffman, n.d.).

Figure 3-7. A modern herder home on the range. Photo by author, August 16, 2013.
Sheep themselves are part of the working landscape and numbers, types, and specific grazing allotments have changed through the years. The definition of a large sheeping operation in the early twentieth century would have been several thousand. At the Crazy Mountain Museum in Big Timber and in the *Tri-County Atlas*, local family histories tell of individual families owning 3,000 to 50,000 sheep. While 50,000 sheep was an uncommonly high number, 2,000 to 7,000 sheep was not. *Big Timber Pioneer* newspaper articles also reveal common sizes of sheep bands, stating “Beasley this week sold about 6,000 head of wethers, lambs and old ewes” (1902, 18 September, 5), “a crew is still working on the 8,600 head of A.M. Grosfield” (1933, 22 June, 5), or news on the condition of 1,662 ewes resident J.L. Rapstad was wintering (1905, 20 April).

With larger bands of sheep roaming Sweet Grass County, they would have been seen on the landscape differently. The most noticeable difference would have been the numbers, both total numbers throughout the county, but also the number of sheep seen together. Since bands were larger, more sheep would be in one area compared to today. Many sheep remained in or near Sweet Grass County during the winter and grazed the winter ranges when the ground was bare. They also relied on supplemental feed such as hay. During the winter, thousands of sheep from outside were brought into the county to feed on the pastures and the hay. The local newspaper boasted of feeding 50,000 sheep for outsiders during the winter (*Big Timber Pioneer* 1920, 10 June). With additional sheep wintering in the county, winter rangeland and pastures near ranches would have been occupied by thousands of sheep. Other sheep were trailed or shipped out of the county, such as to Rosebud County in eastern Montana (*Big Timber Pioneer* 1905, 20
April. During the summer, the sheep were moved out of the lower elevation region. Sheepherders trailed thousands of sheep to mountain meadows where the grass was green and water was available. The Gallatin National Forest, south of Big Timber, was the most common summer grazing area, but some sheepmen also ran their sheep in the Crazy Mountains (Big Timber Pioneer 1933, 29 June). In the early to mid-twentieth century, if one went hiking in the Gallatin National Forest, seeing, hearing, and smelling sheep would not have been an uncommon experience. Not all sheep remained in the area, however. Some ranchers shipped their sheep elsewhere for the summer months, such as to present-day South and North Dakota or just west of Big Timber into the Shields River vicinity (Big Timber Pioneer 1902, 27 March; 1933, 29 June).

As the public domain became regulated and markets changed making sheep less profitable, the large bands of sheep disappeared. Today, owning more than 500 head of sheep in Sweet Grass County is considered a large operation. Smaller bands, called flocks, are much more common today making the working sheep landscape take on a new look compared to in the past. Today, whether winter or summer, sheep can be seen in pastures near the home ranch. The few remaining larger operations in the county trail or ship their sheep into higher elevations to graze summer ranges. The Absaroka Range in the Gallatin National Forest south of Big Timber where thousands of sheep used to graze during the summer, however, is absent of domestic sheep.

Wool Warehouse

In *Hard as the Rock Itself*, David Robertson (2006) discusses two large hills of slag left over from the coal mining days outside of Toluca, Illinois that residents have
affectionately named “The Jumbos.” Because the large slag piles are so prominent, Robertson suggests they are central to Toluca’s outside image. Sweet Grass may not have anything as visibly dominating as “The Jumbos” symbolizing their past to outsiders, but the community does have the wool warehouse. The wool warehouse is central not to Big Timber’s outside image, but to the community’s own inside image. It is a nondescript brick building with graffiti on all of its walls. It does not dominate the landscape, but rather, it sits quietly on the northern edge of town parallel to the railroad tracks (Figure 3-8). No sign posts guide tourists to the building or describe its history. An outsider would likely think little of the warehouse. Anybody who is aware of Big Timber’s past, however, knows the significance of the wool house and the history the building represents in the community.
The wool house that now stands in Big Timber is the fifth wool house to be built in the town. In 1885, local men, C.T. Busha and Joseph Hooper, established the first warehouse to store the region’s wool. It quickly became too small as sheepmen from as far away as the Missouri River began bringing their wool to Big Timber to be stored in the wool warehouse and shipped by rail (Livingston Enterprise 1885, 13 June; Big Timber Pioneer 1896, 9 July). The Northern Pacific Railroad (NPR) responded to the influx of wool by building a wool warehouse in 1889 for area growers to store their wool free of charge until it was ready to ship (Livingston Enterprise 1889, 13 April; Carman et al. 1892). The NPR built a sequence of four wool warehouses in Big Timber. The first three burned. In 1911, they built the current warehouse and constructed the building with
brick walls, concrete, and a metallic roof making it durable enough to function until the present day (Big Timber Pioneer 1911, 20 April). The NPR decided to also change the location of the new warehouse. Previous warehouses had been on the south side of the railroad tracks at the end of Hooper Street. In 1911, the NPR located the new wool warehouse on the north side of the tracks and further east, across from Bramble Street (Figure 3-9). The new location protected the warehouse from the rest of the town in case a fire spread. They believed a fire was unlikely to jump the tracks if either the warehouse started on fire or the town buildings were on fire.

![Figure 3-9](image-url)  
Figure 3-9. Big Timber’s urban landscape signatures. Map by author.

The wool warehouse and the railroad connected the Sweet Grass countryside as
well as many surrounding counties with cities and markets thousands of miles away. The wool warehouse was the epicenter of a large wool growing region that encompassed Sweet Grass and surrounding counties. Local and regional ranchers brought their clipped wool to the warehouse on wagons pulled by teams of oxen, mules, and horses and on rail to be stored until bought by a wool buyer and shipped to larger markets. During the sheep industry’s peak years in Montana, millions of pounds of wool were shipped from the warehouse (Big Timber Pioneer 1895, 7 June; 1900, 16 August; 1904, 28 July; 1908, 2 January). The building provided a dry place for ranchers to store their wool until it could be sold and shipped. Keeping the wool dry was important for quality, and therefore pricing, purposes. After ranchers sold their wool to a buyer, the wool was stacked inside railroad boxcars and shipped to woolen manufacturers. Although woolen manufacturers were widely dispersed, New England, particularly Massachusetts, was the center for woolen manufacturing (Brown 1955). Boston, therefore, was a common destination for wool products.

The wool warehouse and the railroad tracks are no longer points of convergence for large numbers of wool producers. Area ranchers from Sweet Grass County, Stillwater County, and the upper Musselshell store less than 100,000 pounds of wool each year under the warehouse’s roof (Big Timber Pioneer 2012, 12 July). When the wool is sold, it is not shipped by rail, but by semi-trucks hauling the goods over paved highways. Although the area and paths have changed, there is still a connection between the rural Sweet Grass countryside and larger national and international urban markets.

In its earlier days, the wool warehouse symbolized a successful and powerful
local, regional, and national sheep industry. Today, the wool house reflects the community’s past accomplishments. It represents and symbolizes Sweet Grass County’s sheep ranching past. One young, local sheep rancher said, that to her, the wool warehouse simply represents the history of the sheep industry in the community (personal communication, November 28, 2012). The warehouse used to be a busy place during certain seasons, and it stands for many as a reminder of a large part of the community’s heritage.

While the relatively empty interior of the warehouse illustrates the decline of the industry, the building still symbolizes the community’s once powerful and successful sheep industry (Hareven and Langenbach 1981). In exploring buildings in San Ygnancian and the memories people associate with them, Dan Arreola (2002, 100) found that “dwellings have the power to evoke memory, a mnemonic important to many cultures. In small towns particularly, where residents become familiar with neighbors and knowledgeable about their surroundings, this quality is accentuated.” Older Sweet Grass County residents recall from their experiences or from what they heard from earlier generations the wool warehouse’s centrality. Greg Mosness grew up in the area and remembers the wool house being filled with wool. His father and grandfather would reminisce about wool being stacked “higher than you could imagine” on the train cars (Big Timber Pioneer, 2011, 7 February, 3). Others connect the warehouse with photos of the past. One local remarked, “We used to see those pictures of the oxen. Hundreds of them pulling wool” (Carter 2012). Sweet Grass County residents often remark that Big Timber was built on the sheep industry, and the warehouse is one reminder of the
region’s once thriving sheep industry that was the foundation of the community.

The wool warehouse functions as not only a general reminder of the sheep industry’s role in Big Timber, but for many, it also functions as a landmark rich in personal memory. On the interior and exterior of the brick building, names, dates, and drawings adorn the brick walls and wooden beams (Figure 3-10). Individuals who worked with sheep and wool, from ranchers, herders, and wool clerks to high school boys loading wool onto railcars, signed their name and the date on the warehouse walls. These names and dates, ranging in time from 1915 to the present, represent stories, memories, and experiences related to the sheep business in Sweet Grass County.

Figure 3-10. An interior wall of the wool warehouse covered in signatures. Photo by author, November 28, 2012.

When sheep and wool were prevalent in Sweet Grass County, young men were
hired as part of the seasonal “wool crew” to load 300-pound plus sacks of wool on the railcars (Big Timber Pioneer 1974, 4 July). Now that they are older, these same men reminisce about the hard work and hot, sweaty conditions of loading the heavy sacks of wool onto railcars during the summer months. They have their intangible memories, but their signatures provide tangible reminders of the past for anybody to see. Some men even signed their names on the warehouse as part of a wool crew (Figure 3-11). One Big Timber resident said, “I think it was a rite of passage that any of the young guys that were working there had to sign it” (personal communication. September 2013). Rita Esp has many memories of sheep ranching with her husband. She said when she steps in the wool house, she can just smell the wool (personal communication, September 2013). And that smell brings back memories. “It brings me back to the time when I did have sheep. We raised sheep all of my married years. And after my husband passed away, I raised them, too, for a while by myself. So of course it makes me think of him, too, then and our family. If they were sheep raisers and that’s where you made your money by selling lambs and or wool or whatever you did, you appreciate the smell” (Carter 2012).
Figure 3-11. A Big Timber “wool crew” signs their names. Photo by author, October 3, 2015.

Generally, younger generations do not have memories of shared experiences with the names on the wall. Despite the lack of personal experience with certain names, a connection still exists to people of the past and their involvement in the sheep industry. Today, local residents are able to connect the present with the past. When touring the building with two locals, seeing names prompted stories of individuals. Sometimes they were simple statements such as, “This is the county assessor now. Back in 1971” (personal communication, November 28, 2012). Names on the wall can also be tied to specific ranches in Sweet Grass County. David Breck shared his connection to one name on the wall saying, “Ward Officer down here, they lived on the place that we live on now, west of Big Timber. And we live about a mile from where my mom grew up” (Carter
The treasurer of the 2012 Sweet Grass wool pool, Jennifer Breck, visits the wool warehouse often for work purposes. Occasionally she spends time looking at the names, but with names covering all of the surfaces of the warehouse, it can be difficult to find a specific name. “I was hoping to find my grandfather’s, but I never could. Cuz my grandfather, you know, was a sheepherder, and then they had sheep, but I never found it” (personal communication, November 28, 2012). Names on the walls connect individuals to their family, friends, community and the county’s sheeping past.

Raising sheep used to be a primarily male activity. The summer wool crews were male, as were the wool clerks and buyers, shearers, and sheepherders. The names on the warehouse affirm this as male signatures dominate the walls and beams of the warehouse. Females were involved in the industry, but more indirectly and more privately. They cooked for the male workers, raised bum lambs in or near the home, and helped run errands. Big Timber resident Rita Esp recalled how women’s roles have changed through the years. “In the past,” she said, “women didn’t work outside much. They were supposed to cook, raise a garden, raise kids. But now women are much more involved” (personal communication, September 2013). Some have become more directly involved with the business being the primary sheep raisers in the family. They visit the warehouse as their wool is transported from trucks to storage and when wool is sold. Their signatures become more visible in the latter part of the twentieth century as women ranchers signed their names.

The wool warehouse contains additional memories. Two curators at the Crazy Mountain Museum reminisced about a “hobo jungle” near the warehouse after World
War II (personal communication, September 2013). Primarily men, but sometimes families, would ride the trains and look for work along the way. As children, the curators remember visiting the “hobo jungle” and eating big meals with the workers and listening to their stories. One itinerant man who was part of the “hobo jungle” returned multiple years to help when wool was being shipped out. “TEX - KING OF THE TRAMPS” signed his name on a warehouse wall, and decades later, locals continue to talk of him and that period in time when itinerant help was more common in the area (Big Timber Pioneer 2008, 27 June).

Yi-fu Tuan (1975, 162) suggests, “a great building is also an image of communal life and values: it is communal experience made into tangible and commanding presence.” The wool warehouse is a “great building” that “helps maintain individual identities and a collective sense of place” (Robertson 2006, 10). When a large segment of the population has personal memories associated with a building, such as the Big Timber community and their wool warehouse, it achieves more significance to the community because the memories are also associated with other people with whom they shared certain experiences (Hareven and Langenbach 1981).

Big Timber’s wool warehouse is not only a symbolic feature reminding people of the past, but it remains a functional landscape feature as well. Although wool is not stacked to the ceiling anymore, the Sweet Grass wool pool, along with other area wool pools, continues to store its wool in the building before it is sold (Big Timber Pioneer 2012, July 12). The remainder of the building floor space is rented out to the feed mill next door. Whereas teenage boys used to spend all summer working in the warehouse,
stacking wool, and loading it onto railcars, today it takes a handful of wool growers only half a day to load two semi-truck loads. Despite the smaller numbers in pounds of wool and producers, David Breck said that the individuals and families that remain involved are “proud of what they do and our heritage. You see that pride here in this building, and you can see it when we all get together on a day like this” (Big Timber Pioneer 2012, July 12, 12).

Based on research in urban industrial environments, Hareven and Langenbach (1981, 118) found that “what counts is the symbolic value of the building – the way of life and the sense of continuity which it represents.” Further, they suggest, “the survival of buildings and landmarks associated with a familiar way of life provides continuity of social as well as physical fibre.” The wool warehouse is an important building to the community. Through all of the industry’s changes, the wool house still stands. It was built when the Sweet Grass sheep industry was thriving, and it continues to stand as the industry is at a much lower point. The sheep industry no longer dominates the local economy, but the survival of Big Timber’s wool warehouse does provide continuity with a sheep ranching way of life as school reunions tour the building, high schoolers visit the warehouse to sign their names and “leave their mark” on the warehouse walls, and the few sheep ranchers left in the area continue to sign their names on the walls when they bring their wool to the warehouse. Kevin Halverson, a fourth generation sheep rancher living in Sweet Grass County, who has heard stories from family members of the past and has seen the sheep industry at high and low points himself, remains hopeful about the wool house’s role in the community saying, “I hope it’s not going to lose its identity, but
you know, it was the wool house, it still is the wool house, and hopefully it will be the wool house” (Carter 2012). As the economy and way of life changes in Sweet Grass County, the wool warehouse continues to stand, bridging the past with the present.

Sheepherder Mascot

High school mascots, when not generic fierce animals or people, can create a local image of a people and a place. Mascots can reflect a community identity or pride, whether it represents the past or present local economy, fauna that made or makes their home in the region, residents’ cultural and ethnic characteristics, local folklore or folk heroes, or a local historical figure or event (Zeitler 2008). Mining communities with mascots such as the Midwest Oilers in Wyoming or the Copperheads in Anaconda, Montana reveal part of their history and place identities with their high school mascots. In Washington, the Ridgefield High School mascot, the Spudders, reflects a place identity associated with its history as a potato farming region, while the Darrington Loggers mascot reflects part of its heritage as a logging community. Athletic nicknames are locally and regionally known by many people, and they can become synonymous with a place for both local residents and outsiders. As such, the mascots can become associated with and reflect local place identities.

The Sheepherder as a mascot has been associated with Big Timber high school students since the early twentieth century. In 1921, Big Timber high school students began publishing a school paper, naming it The Sheepherder (Big Timber Pioneer 1921, 20 October). The local newspaper, the Big Timber Pioneer, began referring to the Sweet Grass County high school sports teams as “Sheepherders” or “Herders” in 1922 (Big
Timber Pioneer 1922, 9 February). Prior to their official mascot, the sports teams were referred to simply as the Sweet Grass team. Today, the Sheepherder mascot featuring an old sheepherder with a weathered hat and smoking a pipe represents the influence sheep ranching had on shaping the place and continues to have on shaping the place identity of Sweet Grass County. It has become a symbol associating Sweet Grass County with a sheeping past.

The mascot’s imprint on the landscape is varied. Every individual attending high school in Big Timber is nicknamed a Herder. On almost a daily basis, they are each reminded of their community’s sheeping heritage. Inside the high school gymnasium, a sign hangs dedicating the space as “Herder Territory.” Graduations, basketball and volleyball games, and daily school activities take place in “Herder Territory.” Students use the Sheepherder and its associated images and language to create signs to display at games, such as “Baaad Call” (The Big Timber Pioneer 2015b) or “Even Jesus was a Sheepherder” (The Big Timber Pioneer 2015a). During homecoming, students of all ages show their support of the Herders at the homecoming parade. Younger and older classes hold up “Go Herder” signs with sheepherder images or paint large signs with the mascot that are secured to floats and trucks (Figure 3-12). The signs are temporary and mobile landscape features, yet they are enduring as year after year, new signs are made by students.
The Sweet Grass County community is also supportive of their Herders. When sporting activities, such as the touting of a Herders’ victory in basketball, grace the pages of the *Big Timber Pioneer*, every reader is made aware of Sweet Grass’s association with sheep. When a Herder team attends District or State Tournaments, the newspaper prints an inset with “Go Herders” spread across the pages that businesses put up in their windows. Some businesses also paint their windows with “Go Herders” signage. Sweet Grass families show their support of the Herders in tournaments by painting hay bales. The decorative “Herder” windows and hay bales are temporary landscape features, but meaningful ones for some community members, as they say it is not merely a basketball or football symbol, but the “herder” symbol that is seen and celebrated throughout the
community. It is a reminder that like the high school gymnasium, Big Timber is still “Herder Territory.”

In addition to the mascot symbol serving as a temporary feature on the landscape, the Sheepherder mascot is etched into permanent features making it visible year round for community members and those visiting Big Timber. The school and community painted the smoking sheepherder onto the high school scoreboards, buses, and more recently the town’s water tank (Big Timber Pioneer 2006, 13-16 October) (Figure 3-13). To paint the Sheepherder on the water tank, a group of Sweet Grass High School graduates created a committee to raise funds as the city council decided not to fund the painting of the emblem (Big Timber Pioneer 2006, 13-19 October). The formation of an independent community committee to raise money instead of the city council using tax money to paint the emblem on the prominent water tank shows a sense of community pride amongst some residents for the Sheepherder mascot. Geographer Dolores Hayden (1995) is an advocate for community involvement in shaping a town’s landscape. If residents are involved, the art, in this case the art on the water tank, resonates more with the community. The painting of the Sheepherder was a grassroots effort as Big Timber’s residents, not the City Council, decided to celebrate the Sheepherder as a significant part of the community.
Figure 3-13. The Sheepherder mascot gracing Big Timber’s water tower. Photo by author, June 13, 2013.

Despite an economy no longer dominated by the sheep industry, the Sheepherder mascot remains a strong symbol for the community. In 2000, Beccy Oberly, a Sweet Grass County resident since 1976 and the newspaper editor at the time, wrote and printed a piece, “Out with the Herders - In with the BC’s” in the local newspaper calling for a change from the Sheepherder to the Border Collie as the school mascot (Big Timber Pioneer 2000, 21-27 July). Oberly argued the sheepherder mascot was outdated for there are no more sheepherders and few sheep in the county. She also argued that sheepherders are not intimidating and that a smoking mascot was politically incorrect. She received multiple letters from current and former community members rebutting her suggestion. One letter suggested that the Sheepherder was indeed intimidating when a grizzly bear
tried to get too close to the sheep (Big Timber Pioneer 2000, 28-3 July August). Another resident wrote, “We, as Sheepherders, represent fair play, tough competition, and genuine loyalty to our team, our school and our community” (Big Timber Pioneer 2000, 4-10 August). Folklorist Mary Hufford (1987, 22) wrote, “places and their names are sources of identity and security.” By the strong and emotional response initiated by Oberly’s article, it appears the Sheepherder has become an image and a name contributing to the place identity and security of Sweet Grass County and its residents, whether or not there are any more sheepherders or sheep roaming the hills and streets.

**Monuments**

Monuments are also important landscape components because they can offer insights about cultural attitudes. Public monuments are not simply aesthetic, ornamental features of a landscape, but rather, they are highly symbolic expressions that bestow meaning about some aspect of a place (Whelan 2005). Monuments reveal meaningful historical events or figures valued by a community.

One important monument in Big Timber celebrates the local woolen mill, built in 1901 (Figure 3-14). Despite Sweet Grass County’s affiliation with sheep ranching and wool growing, it took persuasion and help from an outside investor to accomplish the building of a local woolen mill. An article in the *Big Timber Pioneer* stated, “The enthusiasm of the people in the woolen mill proposition is somewhat dying out and now the PIONEER takes it in hand” (1897, 30 December). The local newspaper frequently published persuasive articles touting Big Timber as the best place to build a mill. With the Boulder River providing water and millions of pounds of wool nearby, promoters and
investors saw Big Timber as an excellent place to have a woolen mill. Those in favor of a mill argued it would lower the cost of goods for consumers, provide higher prices for wool for sheepmen, put more money in circulation, and make Big Timber the “manufacturing center of the state and…one of the leading ones of the west” (Big Timber Pioneer 1898, 4 August, 4). Eventually the mill was built with funds coming from local investors and knowledge and machinery provided by William Whitfield who relocated his woolen mill machinery to Big Timber from Illinois. Even after the mill was built and producing blankets, the Sweet Grass Woolen Mill’s elected board continued to solicit local and regional residents to buy stock and invest in the mill.

Optimism and a booster mentality were not enough to keep the mill in operation.
The Sweet Grass Woolen Mill only operated intermittently until 1906. Rarely did it run at full capacity. Operating a successful woolen mill took expertise in the realm of business manufacturing, and although Whitfield had operated a woolen mill in Illinois, he miscalculated the Sweet Grass mill. Sweet Grass County did have an abundance of raw material, but most of the county’s woolgrowers did not sell their wool to the local mill. Further, local residents benefited little from the mill. The workforce was small, employing at most only about 15 people. A skilled workforce was needed, so the Sweet Grass Woolen Mill brought in experienced weavers and spinners (Big Timber Pioneer 1902, 13 February; 1902, 13 March). It was also difficult to find enough local investors. If residents had extra money, they invested in sheep, not the woolen mill. In a more national context, the Sweet Grass mill could not keep up with the larger markets and mills found in the northeast United States.

For the next couple of decades, from 1910 to the early 1930s, the former mill building was used as a hatchery and an apiary. The owners did not maintain the building, and in later years, it became used as a dumping ground (Lahren and Murray 1978). In the late 1970s, however, the attitude toward the abandoned mill changed. There were plans for the interstate to be built through the town, and the mill would be destroyed to make way for the highway. Despite few residents having personal memories of the mill in operation, there was a local push to save it, with frequent newspaper “calls to action” (Big Timber Pioneer 1978, 10 May; 17 May; 7 June). Alice Hoofnagle was one resident who remembered the mill being built, and she worked to get the mill turned into a museum (Big Timber Pioneer 1980, 10 September). Other residents would also have
liked to see the mill used as a museum or an art gallery (Lahren and Murray 1978). The majority of residents, however, knew little about the mill’s history, and a study conducted by Anthro Research Incorporated concluded the mill was not worth preserving as it was not historically significant enough to the community or the state. The study also concluded its condition was too expensive to restore it to safe standards (Lahren and Murray 1978). Some residents were disappointed, but soon after the mill was demolished, the community erected a monument in the city park built with material from the original mill. The memorial includes a photo of the woolen mill and a brief history of the mill.

With the woolen mill no longer standing, today’s generation will not have personal memories of the mill. Their knowledge will most likely come from a display at the local museum, the monument’s plaque sharing a brief history, or stories from the past printed by the local newspaper. There are some residents who still have memories of the building before it was demolished. Their memories are rarely, however, associated with the building as a working mill. Rather, they include playing at the mill as young children. Edna Goosey remembers “field day” at the woolen mill during the 1920s. She said she and rest of the kids would explore the inside of the mill (Big Timber Pioneer 2003, 9 May). Kevin Halverson also remembers exploring the building as a kid with his friends. Despite few memories, there were enough people in the community who felt it was important to have a monument commemorating the mill and its history in Big Timber.

**Public Art on the Big Timber Landscape**

Tuan (1975, 161) suggests that “art provides an image of feeling.” It enables people to see a particular aspect and perspective of a particular time period as presented
by the artist and the viewers’ own experiences. Art is an avenue where representations of place identity can be expressed and found (Wyckoff 2014a). Big Timber has grown as an artist community. World renowned sculptors, painters, and sketch artists have made their home in Big Timber and periodically put on workshops bringing other artists to the rural community. For some Big Timber artists, both native and non-native, the region’s past influences their work. The art they create shapes the local landscape, and the city of Big Timber and its residents each perceive and experience the art in various ways. The City of Big Timber tends to have a more commercial and tourism driven perspective while for residents, the art may simply be part of the everyday landscape representing a shared local identity. The two works of public art in Big Timber, a sculpture and a mural, illustrate two different ways of representing the community’s sheep ranching traditions.

The first work of public art is a sculpture of a lamb and ewe (Figure 3-15). It is displayed adjacent to one of the main streets of Big Timber on the courthouse lawn, a special place according to geographer Edward Price (1968). Its placement signifies the importance of the sheep industry to Sweet Grass County. Yi-Fu Tuan (1975, 161) also proposes that sculptural art “creates a place, a center of meaning.” Similar to the mural, there are different viewpoints of the sculpture. The designer and creator of the sculpture, Dan Halverson, is a fourth generation Sweet Grass resident. His great-grandfather was one of the first men to bring sheep to the region in 1883. Dan grew up on his family’s sheep ranch and helped run the operation for a time. His background connects him closely with the sheeping heritage of Sweet Grass.
Figure 3-15. A sculpture of a lamb and ewe sits outside the county courthouse in Big Timber. Photo by author, October 3, 2015.

Although the community did not help design the sculpture, they were involved in other ways. Community members donated some of the materials, such as the concrete base, rocks for the base, and the cross links for the wool (Big Timber Pioneer 1984, 15 August). The sheep sculpture, although small and somewhat understated, represents part of Sweet Grass County’s place identity. David Lowenthal (1979, 103) states that without an awareness of the past, people “would lack…all knowledge of [their] own identity.” At the public dedication of the sculpture, John Ronneberg spoke of the importance of the livestock industry, especially sheep, to the shaping of Sweet Grass County and its economy. He shared the importance of a community having an awareness of the past, saying, “Let us not forget our ties with the past, for it gives us a basis for the future” (Big
The second work of art related to Big Timber’s sheeping past found a place on the city’s landscape more recently. In 2007, Suz Marshak, a non-native Big Timber resident, began painting a large mural on the side of a concrete fence on McLeod Street near Big Timber’s business district (Figure 3-16). The mural depicts a stoic sheepherder with his dog in 1938 as they watched over the sheep in the Boulder River drainage. His sheep are trailing behind him in the distance. In other scenes, a woman spins wool and men load wool in the Big Timber wool warehouse. Marshak felt that the sheep industry was a significant part of Sweet Grass’s past (personal communication, September 13, 2013). She worked with the researchers at the Crazy Mountain Museum and found historical images from the region that she used to create the mural. To fill in the blank space, Marshak painted Montana flowers and other Sweet Grass County landscapes. Marshak’s incorporation of local landmarks, landscapes and themes, reinforces the community’s memories of the past and strengthens a place identity associated with the sheep industry. By painting the local sheep industry and incorporating local landmarks, Marshak plays a role in creating and celebrating a place identity based on sheeping traditions in Big Timber.
Figure 3-16. A mural showing the city’s “former claim to fame.” Photo by author, October 8, 2016.
The mural can also be viewed from a promotional and tourism perspective. When Diane Taylor was mayor of Big Timber in 2006, she saw the beautification of Big Timber as important for the community. She and the Big Timber City Council felt painting a mural along McLeod Street was one way to beautify the town. When Marshak presented her ideas to the City Council, which included one mural expressing the importance of tourism to the present local economy, while the other mural would look to the past, they approved. The Council liked Marshak’s idea of a mural depicting the progression of the sheep industry for as members acknowledged, the industry was “once the city’s primary claim to fame” (Big Timber Pioneer 2007, 8-14 June, 1). Bill Frazier, the City Attorney at the time, also said it could bring tourist money into the local economy as some people plan their travels around public art displays, such as murals. While individuals on the council may have viewed the mural in different ways, as a group, the council recognized the commercial benefits of the mural for Big Timber. Beccy Oberly, a former newspaper editor who is still involved in the community, commented that the tourist likes images of the “wild west” and stories of locals (personal communication, February 18, 2015). The mural provides tourists with one image of Sweet Grass’s “wild west” past. It gives them a glimpse into how local people perceive the place by illustrating the heritage of Sweet Grass County. Tourists leave with a better sense of the place. Some tourists even share their experiences with the place, citing the mural, on their personal blogs (Where’s Liz 2012; Big Sky Fishing 2018).

In addition to the perspectives the artist, the City Council, and the tourists have of the mural, the community experiences the mural in their own way. Dolores Hayden
(1995, 75) suggested that “no public art can succeed in enhancing the social meaning of place without a solid base of historical research and community support.” The painting of the sheep mural involved the community and overall, the community supported Marshak’s work. The local newspaper acted as a forum for residents to voice their thoughts on the mural and kept residents informed of the proceedings and Marshak’s progress on the artwork. Community support could be seen with the money locals donated for the mural as well as the role of the local museum in assisting Marshak with her research for the artwork.

During the early stages of the painting of the mural, some members of the community raised questions concerning the financing of the artwork. Although one resident was supportive of the idea of the mural and thought it would attract tourists, in the Letters to the Editor section of the paper, she expressed her belief that the money should first be spent on repairing the streets of Big Timber (Big Timber Pioneer 2007, 15-21 June). The Big Timber Pioneer followed up with the Mayor and Council’s response. According to Mayor Taylor, the Council was not financing any part of the mural, but rather it was financed through grants and donations (Big Timber Pioneer 2007, 27-2 July-August). Marshak said the first $10,000 was all raised by private donations (personal communication, September 13, 2013). One individual who has a personal interest in the sheep industry donated $5,000, while many of the other donations were smaller. Private, local donations show a certain level of community support.

Depending on one’s experiences and association with the sheep industry, the mural has different meanings to different people within the community. According to the
Sweet Grass County Extension Agent, the mural was painted to preserve the community’s history. As we talked of the mural, he began reflecting on the industry in Sweet Grass County. Looking at the mural, he said, “It preserves our history…an unfortunately dying industry” (personal communication, November 2012). While Marshak was working onsite on the mural, locals stopped to talk about the artwork with her. Other residents simply honked and waved as they drove by to show support for her work (Big Timber Pioneer 2009, 16 July). Marshak’s status as a local resident who has researched the past and shown interest and involvement in the community assists in the community’s support of her work. The sheepherder Marshak painted was Sylvester Lavold. Lavold is a surname associated with the Big Timber sheep industry beginning in 1886 (Pioneer Memories 1960). For residents related to Sylvester Lavold, the mural has more personal meaning than for a resident with no direct family connection to sheeping. Marshak notes that people comment of their relation to Lavold, now one of Big Timber’s iconic sheepherders as his face graces one of Big Timber’s primary streets (Big Timber Pioneer 2009, 16 July).

Cemetery Headstones

While exploring cemeteries in Texas, Terry Jordan (1982, 7) suggested that “no better place exists to ponder questions of culture history.” Cemeteries have been called “cultural spores…that house[s] a wealth of information” (Smith, J. 2002, 439) and “cultural texts…to be read and appreciated by anyone” (Meyer 1993, 3). They are seen as “powerful elements of the cultural landscape…infused with religious and cultural meaning” (Post 2013, 335). Geographers have studied the regional differences in
cemeteries showing how cemetery characteristics differ between the American South, New England, and the Southwest (Zelinsky 2011). Cemeteries have offered clues to cultural origins and diffusion (Jordan 1982). Some scholars have utilized cemeteries in cultural-historical research by examining headstone art. Personalized headstones with engraved imagery represent a permanent, visible expression of identity (Meyer 1989). In timber producing regions, it is not uncommon to find headstones in area cemeteries engraved with log imagery (Meyer 1989; Morrissey 1997). Engravings of ships on 18th and 19th century headstones denote a maritime society (Weski 2008). In the Mountain View Cemetery near Big Timber, Montana it is common to find headstones engraved with sheep imagery.

Headstone engravings are common in the Mountain View Cemetery with the most common themes being outdoor recreation, nature, and ranching. The majority of the headstones containing detailed engravings are dated from the 1980s to the present when laser engravings became more common. With laser engravings, families can choose a specific photo to display on the headstone (Figure 3-17). If a farm flock was a part of the family’s identity, they could provide a photo of their farm to the funeral home which could then send it to a monument company outside of the state to engrave it. The engraving of the headstones is primarily an individual and family appreciation for the industry and each of their roles in it. Various types of sheep scenes capture different aspects of the industry, such as small flocks of sheep grazing near the home ranch, herding sheep in the Gallatin National Forest, or an antiquated sheepherder’s wagon.
Interpreting headstone art has its limitations. There can be other meanings to engravings. For example, including lambs or sheep on headstones is common in cemeteries other than Mountain View Cemetery. Many times sheep or lambs symbolize innocence or have religious connotations. Therefore, by taking into account the surrounding landscape and other sources of information, one can better explore the meanings of headstone art (Hargreaves and Holland 1997).

Obituaries often mention a person’s fondness for sheep, their time spent as a sheepherder, or their sheep and wool related hobbies. While lambs or sheep may symbolize innocence or religion in other cemeteries, in Sweet Grass County, many of them have a more personal and place-based meaning. Some headstones, such as those of
the Osens, only include sheep and lamb engravings in a “placeless” setting, but their life stories indicate that raising or herding sheep was a large part of their life. Toby Osen migrated to Big Timber from Norway in 1909 and found a job herding sheep for various ranchers in the region (Big Timber Pioneer 1984, 11 July). His son, Ommund Osen, farmed and owned a flower shop, but also spent some time herding sheep (Big Timber Pioneer 1990, 4-10 April). Although neither father nor son operated a large sheep ranch or spent the majority of their lives herding sheep, it appears to have been a meaningful part of their lives as they had sheep engraved on their headstones.

Many of the engravings include specific aspects of the industry or particular places, such as one’s farm or an old sheepherder’s wagon. Selmer Raisland’s headstone contains an engraving of a traditional sheepherder’s wagon (Figure 3-18). His obituary states that herding sheep was his “specialty” in his younger years. After he retired, he began restoring old sheepherder wagons (Big Timber Pioneer 1996, 5-12 September). A particular aspect of the sheep industry, sheepherding and wagons, was a significant part of Raisland’s life, and by having an engraving of a wagon on his headstone, he chose to be identified with that part of the industry.
Others include representations of the Crazy Mountains or the Absaroka Range. The Allestad family has been involved in the sheep ranching industry in Sweet Grass County since they left Norway in the early part of the twentieth century. Selmer Allestad herded sheep for area ranchers for over 50 years (Big Timber Pioneer 1986, 23 April). His brother, Ludvig Allestad, started out herding sheep when he first migrated to the Big Timber area. Eventually, he owned and operated his own sheep ranch for over 30 years (Big Timber Pioneer 1992, 26-3 February March). Sheep were a large part of Selmer and Ludvig’s lives. They spent countless days surrounded by sheep whether it was at the ranch during lambing time or herding them in the Absaroka and Beartooth mountain ranges. The Sweet Grass County sheep imagery with mountains as the background on
their headstones represents an expression of personal and place-based identity (Figure 3-19).

Figure 3-19. A sheep ranching family decorates their headstone with sheep and mountains. Photo by author, September 5, 2014.

When the headstones in the Mountain View Cemetery are read as cultural texts, they offer insights into the local society and what they value. The Crazy Mountains or the Absaroka Range provide a background for the raising of sheep in Sweet Grass County. The imagery shows the importance of sheep ranching as an identity for individuals and families and the place in which it occurs. Individual and community sheep stories are anchored in a landscape, specifically a Sweet Grass landscape. By including specific features, the engravings illustrate that raising sheep in Sweet Grass County assisted in shaping the lives of some residents, and these residents, among others, played a role in
shaping the place identity of the Big Timber region.

Sweet Grass County is filled with various sheep landscapes, from the vernacular sheep fences to features celebrating the significance of the sheep industry and its role in shaping the place identity. To many residents, the surrounding landscapes are simply part of the place. Beccy Oberly said, “You don’t even think about it around here until someone new comes around and points it out. But there’s a lot of pride in what’s here and in the past” (personal communication, February 18, 2015). While the landscape and the memories anchored to it may not always be a daily, conscious celebration of the past, they do serve as reminders of a common community past and the distinct heritage of the place and the people.

Community

When Peirce Lewis (1979b, 41) was exploring towns with a strong sense of place, he found that “all of these places, no matter what else they have, have a sense of shared experiences.” Part of discovering a community’s shared experiences involves listening to memories and stories that are associated with the place. Scholars have shown the value of exploring such collective memories in communities (Hufford 1987; Ryden 1993; Robertson 2006; Wheeler 2014). One of the binding activities that have created shared experiences for Big Timber residents has historically been ranching activities, including the raising of sheep. The rhythms of life in a sheep ranching community are distinct. Annual rounds of activities, such as shearing, lambing, docking, trailing, and herding, take on considerable meaning (Wyckoff 2013). In *A Short Season: Story of a Montana*
Childhood, Don Morehead (Morehead and Morehead 1998, 28) described life on a Montana sheep ranch as flowing in “metrical rhythms…where work is synchronized to the cadences of seasons and cycles of life. Moving along to predictable tempos, we participated in each season, each cycle, and even as we strained against the elements, found reassuring connections between the natural world and our human one.” Although there are fewer sheep in Sweet Grass County today, the seasonal activities continue to provide a rhythm to the community. A former Big Timber Pioneer newspaper editor used the example of shearing time: “When it’s shearing season, that’s what molds our place, even if you’re not directly part of it” (personal communication, September 2013). It is a topic of conversation between community members. Today, fewer residents have direct experience with the seasonal activities, but the place they live in continues to be shaped by the presence of shearing activities. Memories also remain. Residents have memories from the past from either their own experiences or experiences that have been shared with them from older residents, school tours, or museum visits. The practices associated with raising sheep and the meanings attached to the events assist in shaping Sweet Grass’s place identity.

Men and women in Sweet Grass County may have different specific memories, meanings, and experiences of raising sheep depending on their roles and partly on their age. Traditionally, women were in charge of making meals, both on a day-to-day basis but also large meals for the shearing crews and others helping during shearing time. Women, more than men, also recollect caring for bum lambs during lambing season or memories as children accompanying their fathers on various tasks, such as bringing food
to the herders during the summer. In more recent times, however, women’s roles have expanded. While in the past, the primary rancher was commonly a male, in the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, in Sweet Grass County, both men and women assume the role of primary rancher. Not only are more women involved in the care of sheep, but women’s roles are diverse. They may take on a variety of roles such as rancher, caretaker for the bum lambs, wool gatherer, wool and meat marketer, wool grader, house cook, and even shearer. Shearing has generally been a male activity because it requires great physical strength. In Sweet Grass County, however, it is now not uncommon to see women shearing. Elaine Allestad said she and her husband have sheared their one thousand sheep by themselves in the past (personal communication, July 10, 2013). Instead of doing the shearing themselves, they now have a cousin and a local female sheep rancher shear the sheep in one day. Joy Jesson took a class from the Montana State University Extension Service and was part of a traveling shearing crew (Big Timber Pioneer 2011, 17 February). Several local women are also influenced by the sheep industry in an artistic sense. They spin their own wool, create weavings, and assist with school demonstrations to show the process of working with wool. Men, women, and children continue to be involved or made aware of the sheep industry in various ways, and as participation in more sheep-related activities expands to both genders, they will have new memories, meanings, and experiences.

Shearing

Aspects of the industry have changed, but much also remains the same. Jean Duffey’s father and grandfather raised sheep in Sweet Grass County, and for over 30
years, she has raised sheep southeast of Big Timber on her Upper Deer Creek ranch. Reflecting on shearing times of the past and present, Duffey commented that although the scene is different, much of the routine remains the same (Big Timber Pioneer 2013, 14 March). They bring the sheep to the shearing area, the shearers shear the thick fleeces off, the wool is “stomped” as much as possible into a bag or bale, and then there is a lunch break so the shearers can fill up on homemade food before shearing again in the afternoon. The scene and details, however, have changed over the decades.

The timing of shearing has changed in Sweet Grass County. In the late nineteenth century and for several decades into the twentieth century, shearing took place in the early summer after lambing. Ranchers and shearers felt that delaying shearing was better for the sheep in case winter lingered with freezing temperatures, heavy snowfall, and blizzards. Waiting until warmer weather also produced heavier fleeces. During hotter weather, there was more oil in the wool, adding weight to the fleeces. The transition to late winter or early spring shearing took both time and evidence to prove that it would work and be better for the ewes to lamb without all of their wool. Fourth generation Big Timber sheep rancher, Kevin Halverson, remembers a story his father told him of the transition. Kevin’s grandmother was so worried that the ewes would freeze to death that she handmade over one thousand sweaters for the sheep to wear after they were shorn (personal communication, November 20, 2012).

The location of shearing has also changed. Beginning in the late nineteenth century when the sheep industry was growing quickly, shearing pens became common in many parts of Montana including Sweet Grass County. Sheepmen trailed the sheep to the
permanent pens and sheds where shearing crews were set up. Sweet Grass County had some public shearing pens that have become part of the community’s collective memory. Crews typically consisted of more than 20 shearers. Local resident George Hatch is credited with establishing the first large shearing pens in Sweet Grass County in 1890. Located west of Big Timber near the Mountain View Cemetery, the pens and sheds were known as the Hardscrabble Pens (Big Timber Pioneer 1975, 14 May). Other shearing pens that have become part of the community’s collective memories include the Seven Mile Shearing Pens and the pens on what was known as the “Hollowpeter place” (Big Timber Pioneer 1983, 4 May). Although only a number of shearing pens are part of the collective memory of the community, there were many shearing pens in Sweet Grass County that were set up near or on area ranches (Big Timber Pioneer 1893, 15 June; 1897, 3 June; 1900, 28, June; 1908, 28 May). Some ranchers ran smaller sheep shearing plants where their own sheep were sheared in addition to their neighbors. The Duffey’s operation sheared approximately 10,000 sheep in a span of two to three weeks (Pioneer Memories 1960). Other ranchers set up temporary plants on their ranch and advertised their services in the paper (Big Timber Pioneer 1908, 28 May).

Shearing season was a busy time in Sweet Grass County, with “all roads leading to Big Timber…lined with freight teams laden with wool” (Big Timber Pioneer 1893, 15 June, 3). The Big Timber Pioneer used to regularly include shearing updates in the “Current Items” section of the paper. The news bits included who was shearing and where, as well as commentary on the quality of the wool. With so many sheep and only limited time, quality shearers were in demand. Each of the shearing plants hired a
shearing crew for the season, and many of the crews were made up of local or regional residents. Some of the crews were made up of most of the same men year after year, such as the Big Timber Shearing Crew. The crews sheared in Sweet Grass County, but many of them also travelled widely across the state and throughout the West, similar to many of today’s itinerant shearing crews. They were a close group of individuals. In a poem written by “one of the bunch,” the author writes, “each one is a good fellow who belongs to this small clan / always ready with a glad mit to help you if he can. / Every one is in good standing, for we never have a due / it is a grand fraternity, the Big Timber shearing crew” (CMM, n.d.).

When stationary shearing plants went out of favor, traveling shearing crews remained. Instead of shearing at one location and ranchers bringing the sheep to them, traveling shearing crews brought their own mobile plants and moved from ranch to ranch. Today, traveling shearing crews with their own shearing plants consisting of a mobile trailer with all of the shearing accessories inside, continue to be the primary means of shearing. Instead of shearing outside, by shearing indoors, the shearers are protected from inclement weather.

Today, shearing crews are smaller and the season is shorter as there are fewer sheep. Shearing, however, has taken on a new meaning for some families. In addition to its economic value and health hazard for the sheep if not sheared, shearing is viewed as a tradition. Family and community members all take part in the festivity of the day. Mary and Gene Langhus said every year they “invite our friends, family, and folks new to the community to let them experience some of the sheep raising tradition” (personal
communication, March 18, 2014). At the Langhus gathering, new community members mix with longtime residents (Figure 3-20). Men and women come and go. At most times there are at least a dozen folks lingering and helping around the barn or back at the kitchen. Some look for a job to do in order to be directly involved, such as sweeping the wool off the ground or picking the vegetation and debris off of the fleece. Others stand off to the side, simply observing the Sweet Grass tradition. Life-long residents tell stories about past times in Sweet Grass when raising sheep was still a common activity among locals and when shearing days were a much larger and busier affair. As was done in the past, a noon meal continues to bring everybody inside to rest and visit before work commences for the rest of the afternoon.

Figure 3-20. Local residents help at the Langhus shearing day. Photo by author, March 23, 2014.
Most shearing days on Sweet Grass County ranches involve family and neighbors. John, a local rancher who used to raise sheep, matter-of-factly said, “People just help one another out” (personal communication, March 20, 2014). A local female rancher described her family’s typical shearing day saying, “He [her husband] shears, and then we have Alvin come in. We bring a couple of the other shearers in and a couple of family members that use to shear” (personal communication, March 20, 2014). Kevin Halverson’s family as well as one of his neighbors visits the ranch for the day to help every year. The Duffey family keeps their help minimal, but traditional, as well. Jean Duffey has had the same shearer, local resident Olen Raisland, shear her sheep for over 20 years. “There’s no shearing day without Olen,” she said (Big Timber Pioneer 2013, 14 March). At Joan Hansen’s shearing day, a local who grew up in the area commented that shearing day “truly is a community event. Everyone likes to help out” (Big Timber Pioneer 2011, 17 February, 3). The day may be festive in some regards with family and neighbors getting together and helping each other, but it is still a day that involves long hours and hard work.

Locals reminisce about shearing days, whether from five years ago or fifty. Bonnie Ferguson said of shearing day that it “has always been a day we look forward to. Ever since I could remember” (Big Timber Pioneer 2013, 14 March). When the weather is pleasant on shearing day, everybody is grateful, as they all have stories of the past when the weather was not as nice. Stories of freezing temperatures or blizzards a day after the sheep were sheared are common. Other locals remember as kids they were always given the job of stomping the wool. One local watched a mechanical stomper
pack wool into a bale and remembered stomping as a kid: “That was us kids’ jobs - we would jump in the bag and stomp the wool down ourselves” (Big Timber Pioneer 2013, 14 March). Generally, it was the job of children to jump into the wool sacks in order to pack the wool down. Sometimes reminiscences come from looking at photographs. While looking at old photos in the Crazy Mountain Museum, one local lady who grew up with sheep saw a photo of men stomping wool into a long burlap sack. She exclaimed, “I hated that job! It was hot and smelly” (personal communication, August 21, 2014). Indeed, the job of stomper has been called the “hottest and grimmest place in the [shearing] shed” (Federal Writers’ Projects 2013, 198). If a Sweet Grass County resident ever attended a sheep shearing day, they have a story to tell about it.

Lambing

Lambing season is a family affair. Ranchers, spouses, and their children all help out and take turns checking the ewes and lambs throughout the day and night. There is a near constant moving of ewes and lambs depending on where they are in the process of lambing. Ewes are moved from outside into the lambing sheds and back out in the nearby pasture once the lamb is healthy and attached. Sometimes ranchers need to help a ewe push her lamb out. While in the “jugs,” or pens inside the lambing sheds, ranchers and wives water and feed the sheep. Pens are set aside for orphaned lambs that need to be nursed until a replacement ewe is found. Sometimes the orphaned lambs receive even more special attention. Many wives of former and current sheep ranchers have stories of raising lambs. Depending on the family, some brought the orphaned, or commonly called bum lambs, into the house to keep them warm and healthy. Dorothy, the wife of a sheep
rancher, remembers doctoring sick lambs in their house by giving them a tiny bit of brandy (personal communication, August 21, 2014). Mary Langhus sometimes brings lambs into the house “to get warmed up, dried off, and get little fleece coats applied” (personal communication, August 20, 2014). Raising sheep is a family affair, and the sheep are sometimes seen as part of the family. Alice DeCock had such a fondness for raising bum lambs that it was included in her obituary (Big Timber Pioneer 2007, 17-23 August). Elaine Allestad remembers having 60 bum lambs one year which was uncommon (personal communication, July 10, 2013). She had to have a herder specifically for the bum lambs.

Other lambing memories are tied closely to food. Alice Tyler would make muffins and casseroles to bring to the lambing sheds while the men were busy at work (Big Timber Pioneer 1900, 23 May). Not all memories from lambing season have a nostalgic feel to them. Predators, especially coyotes, tend to be more of a problem around lambing time as newborn lambs are easier prey. Ranchers have stories of coyotes taking lambs, and herders or ranchers finding their bones in coyotes’ dens (Big Timber Pioneer 1983, 4 May).

In the past, lambing season was not just a family affair, but it affected the community, too. Sheep ranches had to hire extra help during lambing as they could not keep track of thousands of new lambs and ewes on their own. Large sheep ranches had men managing lambing crews (Big Timber Pioneer 1935, 18 April). Individuals hired themselves out by placing advertisements in the local newspaper (Big Timber Pioneer 1975, 19 March). Some ranchers visited one of the local bars in Big Timber to find
temporary help during lambing season (personal communication, July 10, 2013). And even if people in the community were not directly involved with lambing season, the community was aware it was lambing season and that many of their fellow residents were hard at work. Writing for the newspaper, Larry Lowary wrote, “Those of us who live in town can’t begin to imagine the hardships and problems of our rural neighbors who are lambing and calving in this miserable weather” (1975, 2 April, 2). The Big Timber Pioneer recognized how busy its audience was during lambing season with references such as “If you could take out from lambing and calving, you might have seen this display at the MATE Show in Billings last weekend” (1985, 27 February, 1). Byron Grosfield knows the work involved during lambing season, reflecting that “another reason for looking askance at April stems from the many long hours I’ve spent lambing and calving in bad weather” (Big Timber Pioneer 1983, 11 May, 11).

The number of families involved with lambing season has decreased considerably. Many older residents still have memories of lambing, but fewer young residents have direct experiences and memories working with lambs. Whether young or old, however, if they have ranching knowledge, they are still aware when lambing season is upon the ranchers. Although those with memories of a hard, working lambing season are fewer, local journalism assists in reminding readers that lambing season has arrived. The Big Timber Pioneer continues to share stories of lambing and calving with the community (2014, 27 March). As locals drive around Sweet Grass County, they still encounter bleating lambs during the spring. Still, lambing season does not affect the entire community as much as it did in the past. Ranches no longer have to find extra help
in the bar or hire large lambing crews. Their own family, friends, and hired help can handle the work load. Lambing season continues to affect families still waking up in the middle of the night to tend to the ewes and lambs, but it is not as much of a community endeavor.

Trailing

It is not uncommon to hear some Sweet Grass County residents reminisce that “there used to be thirty plus bands of sheep that were trailed up the Boulder River!” When the U.S. Forest Service began regulating and counting bands of sheep entering the forests of the Absaroka and Beartooth mountain ranges, however, that number dropped. Fewer and fewer bands of sheep would be trailed as the number of total sheep in the county fell. During the 1970s and 1980s, it was still fairly common to see sheep being trailed through Big Timber on the way up to higher country in the summer and back through in the early fall to lower ground (Figure 3-21). Businesses along McLeod Street where the sheep were traditionally trailed reminisce about seeing the sheep and the excitement it caused. Business owners and employees would holler, “The sheep are coming!” at which time everybody would run outside to watch and take photos.
Figure 3-21. Trailing sheep through Big Timber (Crazy Mountain Museum, Public Sheep Exhibit).

Big Timber is a small, rural, ranching community, and people are aware of who has sheep and who raises cattle. When sheep were trailed to the high country in the summer, Rita Esp said, “people just knew who’s band of sheep was headed up that day” (personal communication, September 2013). The general knowledge of who was moving sheep on certain days added a bond to the community. It was not simply Allestads trailing sheep on a certain day, but a feeling of pride in their place. Sheep activities such as trailing through the streets of Big Timber were a reflection of the ordinary activities that make up the ranching way of life. As Laura Nelson, former editor of the Big Timber Pioneer, said, “It’s our people” (personal communication, September 2013)

An unconventional trailing episode brought the community together in 2003.
When a forest fire broke out near the Allestad’s sheep, they had to reroute their livestock and bring them out of the national forest and back to Big Timber earlier than planned. An announcement was placed in *The Livingston Enterprise* for anybody with trailers or semi-trucks to meet at the Gardiner rodeo grounds and help move the sheep (*The Livingston Enterprise* 2003). There was no shortage of people to help load and move the sheep. In the documentary, *Ridin’ for the Brand*, Stephanie Alton (2014) captured the spirit of community that was present at the event from the actual loading of sheep to the end-of-the-day gathering where “everyone shared stories, drank beer, and ate barbecued lamb.”

Sheep are no longer trailed through the streets of Big Timber or along the highway to McLeod and on to the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. For longtime residents of the area who have a lot of memories of seeing sheep trailed along the Boulder River, there is a sense of sadness about the changes. Rita Esp reflected on the changes, commenting, “It’s a shame sheep don’t go up there anymore. There had always been sheep” (personal communication, September 2013). Teddy Thompson, a former Sweet Grass County sheep rancher, recalled seeing “all those sheep - some 50,000 - going into the mountains like a huge rolling cloud” (*Billings Gazette* 2002, 4 August). When sheep were trailed considerable distances across public and private lands, the sheep owners negotiated with the people living along the route. Jerry Iverson, a former camptender for Elaine and Lawrence Allestad, recalled the process being fairly easy going as neighbors helping neighbors (personal communication, November 16, 2012). Elaine Allestad said she has had a number of people who live along the route comment to her that they miss seeing the sheep (personal communication, July 10, 2013). It was a
seasonal ritual for not just the sheep ranchers, herders, and camptenders, but also for
people living along the trailing route.

Other Big Timber area residents have memories of their experiences trailing the
sheep. The annual trek to the high-mountain summer grazing allotments became a
working vacation for Lawrence and Elaine Allestad and their children. They trailed the
sheep up together and would return midsummer to check on the herders. While there,
they would enjoy some fishing and camping (Billings Gazette 2010, 14 February).

Today, if sheep need to be moved any considerable distance, trucks and trailers
are used. The number of Sweet Grass residents with memories and experiences of trailing
sheep is fairly small since the days of trailing large bands of sheep between summer and
winter ranges has passed. Those still raising sheep are more likely to have heard of
memories from older family and community members. While those shared memories still
provide a bond for the community with a common past, place specific memories from
trailing sheep are fewer. As time progresses, Sweet Grass will have to rely more on the
sharing of memories through oral traditions and through reminders of the trailing era
from public art, museums, and local journalism.

Sheep Camp: Life and Visits

There are fewer large operations running sheep in Sweet Grass County today.
Farm flocks of 300 or fewer sheep are more common. With sheep kept in fenced pastures
year round near the home, ranchers do not need round-the-clock herding of the sheep.
Instead of trailing sheep to the high country, sheep ranchers now rotate them around
predator-resistant woven-fenced pastures. Guard dogs, in place of herders, are generally
sufficient enough to protect the sheep from predators. Therefore, for most area ranchers, sheep camp visits, like trailing, are now only memories.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, herders took sheep up to the mountains during the summer months. Lambs were fattened on the high country grasses before they were shipped to additional markets in the fall. The herders and camptenders lived at various sheep camps in the mountains. Generally, the same sheep camps were visited year after year. The sheep camps were not comprised of permanent buildings, but more subtle features. Teepee poles, cook tent poles, a hitch post, and possibly an outside fire ring comprised many sheep camps. Each of the camps had a formal or informal name so the rancher, herder, and camptender could all communicate effectively. The folklore surrounding “Alfred’s Camp” in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness was that Alfred, a local herder, was killed by a bear. Thereafter, the camp location was always called “Alfred’s Camp” among herders and ranchers (personal communication, July 10, 2013).

Elaine and Lawrence Allestad have countless memories of summer sheep camps in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Although no longer taking sheep to the reserves after their last season of trailing in 2001, she and her family still recreate in the area. When Elaine sees the different areas they used to trail, herd, and set up camp, memories of bears, lightning, huge storms, predators, packing, and getting up in the middle of the night fill her mind. The memories are tied to a particular place, and for the Allestads the combination of visible and invisible landscapes creates a more meaningful place. Despite the many hazards associated with her time spent in the mountains, Elaine says she misses it. “I mean, it’s just beautiful up there. Lawrence wasn’t much of a church goer, and he
always said, that was his church. He was close to Heaven there” (personal communication, July 10, 2013).

Jerry Iverson, a camp tender between 1978 and 1986, remembers specific campsites. During the day, if the herder or camp tender found any neat rocks, bottles, or artifacts, they would add them to a pile year after year near the campsite. After several seasons, a pile of collectibles sat next to each of the campsites (personal communication, November 16, 2012). Other sheepherders remember the bugs and would find respite on ridge lines where there was a breeze (personal communication, November 20, 2012).

Many of the memories shared by former and current sheep men and women today are on the more positive side and show a sense of nostalgia. Sheep camp life from the distant past, however, shows another aspect of the life. When trailing sheep to the mountains was common among Sweet Grass sheep ranchers, the local newspaper printed stories on their experiences in the mountains. The stories covering sheep camps were not sensationalized or romanticized, but rather, they reflected everyday life for some and items of interest to the local population. Sometimes, the stories simply noted when different bands of sheep were headed to the mountains and the herders trailing the sheep, such as Selmar Allestad who at 72 years of age was in his 53rd year of herding sheep (Big Timber Pioneer 1981, 15 July). Not all of the experiences were neutral or even positive. Herding and camp tending were dangerous jobs, especially before the use of cell phones and instant communication. In the early part of the twentieth century when more individuals were employed in the business, it was not unheard of for men to disappear or die while on the job (Big Timber Pioneer 1907, 1 August; 1916, 8 June). Sweet Grass
County sheep rancher Kevin Halverson recalled his dad finding one of his herders dead from an apparent heart attack. Herding sheep could also be a lonely job, causing some to “go insane” (Big Timber Pioneer 1901, 8 August). Halverson remembers many sheepherders in the past struggling with alcoholism. He has no romanticized views of the job, saying, “Sheep herding is not that glamorous. It’s lonesome” (personal communication, August 17, 2013). A poem printed in the local newspaper titled “The Sheepherder’s Lament” captures some of the difficulties that sheepherders endured, from being “ridiculed and censured” to living in isolation and battling the elements of wind, rain, and snow (Big Timber Pioneer 1906, 8 March, 1).

Similar to trailing, memories of sheep camp must now rely on stories being passed down from sheep ranchers, herders, and camptenders who have first-hand knowledge and experiences to share or through efforts by the community, such as the reprinting of stories from the past in the newspaper or through photos and stories found in the local museum. Individuals with memories are usually happy to share their stories. Elaine Allestad said, “People love to listen to Lawrence and his stories of sheep herders and sheep camps and trailing and all the different stories” (personal communication, July 10, 2013). Those stories, even when they are more nostalgic and may disregard certain exploitative parts of the industry, are part of what gives Sweet Grass County its place identity today.

Finding Laborers – Past and Present

In Sweet Grass County, much of the hired help, from shearsers and herders to those hired to help during lambing season, were local or regional men. Some of the men
had been locals their entire lives, while others made their home in Sweet Grass County after emigrating from as far away as Norway. Locals reminisce about going to the Grand Hotel and Bar or the Court Bar and Hotel to find help lambing, herding, fencing, and other ranching tasks. Elaine Allestad reminisced about finding herders at one of the local bars. “You [went] to a local bar. Back then, you just went in and picked out a sheepherder because there was a variety of them. There were a lot of them back then. And they’d get tired of working for Swensons, go to Bo’s, then get tired of Bo’s, so went to Allestads. They kind of shifted around” (personal communication, July 10, 2013). The common stories of finding laborers are usually told by ranch owners, not the herders themselves. As Ivan Doig (2012, 44) wrote in The Bartender’s Tale, there is always more than one side to the story: “If it wasn’t Dode Withrow in from the ranch with yet another tale about one sheepherder or another quitting for the twentieth or thirtieth time, then it was one sheepherder or another there on a bar stool, drinking his wages and recounting…Dode’s shortcomings as an employer down through the years.” In Sweet Grass, just one part of the narrative has been deeply embedded in the community’s social memories.

Some locals or immigrants to the region did not desire to remain hired help for more than a few seasons. Their goal was to own their own sheep. To accomplish this goal, they worked as herders and were paid in ewes. For each year they herded, the rancher would pay him with a certain number of sheep when he started his own operation. This system allowed the hired men to learn the trade of working with sheep, benefiting them greatly when they began running sheep independently.
By the twenty-first century, most of the sheep ranchers in Sweet Grass County did not need herders. The few who did, however, no longer found them in the local bar. While some occasionally found somebody to herd who is from the region, most began to go outside of the United States to find their help. The ranchers work with regional organizations, such as the Western Range Association or Mountain Plains Association, to import herders primarily from Spain, Mexico, Chile, or Peru. In Sweet Grass County, the foreign laborers rarely immerse themselves in the community unlike herders of the past.

**Community Festivals and Celebrations**

Community events, such as festivals and parades, help to define and commemorate local heritage. Some towns celebrate their ethnic heritage, others their economic traditions. Communities in the American West have begun to capitalize on their vanishing sheep ranching heritage with such events as the Trailing of the Sheep Festival in Sun Valley, Idaho or the annual Sheep is Life celebration in Navajo Country. Reed Point, 24 miles east of Big Timber, celebrates the sheep ranching history of Montana with the Great Montana Sheep Drive held annually over the Labor Day weekend. The event began in 1989 as a spoof to the more popular cattle drive celebrations. The inaugural event was successful with estimates of between 10,000 and 12,000 attendees (Big Timber Pioneer 1989, 6 September). From the beginning, the organizers saw the event as a way to raise money for different town projects from expanding the local library to building a new fire station. Although the event also celebrates Montana’s involvement in the sheep industry, educating attendees about the cultural heritage of various communities’ roles in the sheep industry is not top priority.
In the earlier years of the festival, there was considerable participation from Sweet Grass County sheep ranching families (personal communication July 10, 2013; August 20, 2014; August 20, 2014). They both attended the event and supplied the sheep and dogs needed to run through the town as the highlight of the festival. In addition to local ranching families, sheep producers from all over the state were intrigued by the first event and came to support and enjoy the celebration. Sheep were the focus. During the parade, it was reported that nearly every parade entry was connected to sheep imagery, from featuring a sheep, a sheep wagon, or a slogan celebrating Montana’s sheep industry (The Sun 1989, 6 September). Sheep-themed events have been held over the years, such as the smelliest sheepherder, sheep shearing demonstrations, and cowboy versus sheepherder staged fights. The events, however, are a light-hearted affair and may even assist in propagating some of the myths of Montana’s sheep history by focusing on only part of the story, such as tensions between cattlemen and sheepmen. Further, while some areas of Montana experienced more disagreements and violence between those raising cattle and sheep, in Sweet Grass County, violence between sheepherders and cowboys was not common.

Some festivals remind attendees of their heritage by displaying representative objects from the past (Alexander 2009) or the sharing of stories amongst insiders (Hoelscher and Ostergren 1993). While organizers and attendees of some festivals may celebrate a different heritage today than fifty years ago, there is still a tendency to cater toward insiders. The Reed Point sheep drive has become more of a regional event catered toward outsiders. Families from Billings and the surrounding area have made it a
tradition to attend the sheep drive and camp in Reed Point (personal communication, September 1, 2013). The running of the sheep down the street is still the highlight of the event, but based on personal experience and newspaper accounts, there is not as much attention paid to the cultural history of the sheep industry. The occasional float contains sheep imagery, but classic cars, fire trucks, horses, and the Shriners all throwing candy to the kids are more common. Rather than celebrate and become more aware of the history of the Montana sheep industry, the Great Montana Sheep Drive “has grown into a full-blown community party” where people gather simply to have fun and celebrate the end of summer (Billings Gazette 2008, 1 September). One reporter summed up the event by writing, “The sheep thunder down the street and children and adults alike stand in awe for a few moments (Figure 3-22). Then back to visiting with neighbors, shopping the craft booths, and tasting the flavor of the Great Montana Sheep Drive” (Big Timber Pioneer 2009, 10 September).
The event is attended by many people from regional communities. The Great Montana Sheep Drive is not tied directly to Big Timber, and therefore, does not shape how outsiders perceive the history of Sweet Grass County as much as Montana as a whole. Kevin Halverson said they no longer provide sheep for the festival because it is “not a good deal for the sheep or the people chasing the sheep” (personal communication, October 3, 2012). It is taxing for the ranchers and sheep so local Sweet Grass ranchers are less willing to participate. Kevin believes overall that the festival is “a good thing for the sheep industry.” It does not, however, have a strong role in Sweet Grass’s place identity.

More significant for Big Timber’s place identity are the other annual festivities, such as Sweet Grass Fest, homecoming parades, Christmas parades, and the rodeo, where the sheep heritage is not necessarily the focus, but it is usually present in some form.
Laura Nelson and Beccy Oberly, both former editors of *The Big Timber Pioneer*, found that Big Timber residents love their parades and their floats (personal communication, September 2013; February 18, 2015). In parades, residents say that it is common to see a sheep, a herder, or sheep themes. In the past, floats have included a Sheepherder Chalet in the mountains for the lighted parade, a young boy pulling a mini sheepherder’s wagon, and the class of 1962 being represented by a pickup with a black sheep on the front and using a play on words - “The Black Sheep of the pack….. We’re Baaack!”. Young and old locals use the heritage of their place as a way to be creative in their floats, and sheep and herder characters remain part of the community.

**Community Institutions Preserve the Past: Newspaper and Museum**

Laura Nelson did not grow up in Big Timber. Through her extensive and close work with the community as editor of the local newspaper, however, she described Big Timber as “a community that has stayed true to its roots” (personal communication, September 2013). The community works to remember and preserve their roots, or stories, through the publishing of local history books and family histories, the reprinting of local activities from the past in the newspaper, and particularly through exhibits and events at the museum.

Peirce Lewis (1979b, 43) found that “good local journalism is critical for a sense of place.” Place identity can be shaped by the activities carried out in a place, and newspapers or other forms of journalism that document the day-to-day activities of a place reflect what is happening in the community. The stories indicate to the community what makes their place and contributes to the community’s distinct character. In
continuous print since 1889, the local newspaper, the *Big Timber Pioneer*, has covered sheep related news for over a century. The manner in which the news is covered, however, has changed, reflecting the changing nature of sheep ranching in Sweet Grass County.

Articles in the late 1800s and early 1900s documented sheep activities with succinct snippets of information, such as the names of ranchers that had begun shearing, how shearing was progressing as a whole in the county, how the weather was affecting shearing, wool buyers coming to Big Timber, and local and regional prices of wool. The articles covering daily activities were not embellished, and they were rarely made into large headline stories. Although not headlining news, the editors felt the information was important enough to the community to be included in the newspaper on a regular basis.

Sheep news and business continues to find a place in the *Big Timber Pioneer*, from small notices of the annual Sweet Grass County Wool Growers meeting to the value of using wool as a fiber. Some more recent articles, however, have been made into headline stories. This is a reflection of an industry that has declined in the region, but because it is part of the heritage of the community, it is a way to connect with the community’s livestock traditions. “Good local journalism” continues to help shape Sweet Grass’s place identity. Laura Nelson, editor of the *Big Timber Pioneer* in 2013, felt the stories were important to cover. She said “it’s not breaking news…it is what people are talking about. It’s a reflection of what’s happening in the community today” (personal communication, September 2013). Stories cover families following traditions, shearing day on various local ranches, the process of the wool pool selling wool, and sheep
ranchers adapting to changes, such as foreign herders, weed management programs, and predators. The paper also periodically includes stories of the sheep ranching past in Sweet Grass County, which contributes to the community’s awareness and knowledge of the past.

The Crazy Mountain Museum opened in 1997. Prior to opening, they reached out to the community with letters asking for personal and family stories of life in Sweet Grass County (CMM, 1994). Many of the stories collected involved sheep ranching, as the sheep industry was a considerable aspect in the growth of the County. One museum curator in Big Timber commented, “The sheep industry made Sweet Grass County what it is today, really” (personal communication, August 21, 2014). It was common for families to get their start in Sweet Grass County by raising sheep. A section of the museum is dedicated to family histories of longtime residents, and when residents say, “Sheep paid for many of the ranches here today,” the family stories in the museum support the residents’ knowledge of the past.

When the Crazy Mountain Museum was being built, Tom Biglen, one of the original board of directors for the museum, stated that the museum would not only be “an attractive first introduction to our county for tourists and travelers,” but that it will serve as “one of our county’s important educational institutions drawing together area residents, students, and outside professionals” (Big Timber Pioneer 1990, 28-3 March-April, 5). To support the Board’s goals, exhibits cover topics deemed important to the community, such as family histories, school history, Native American history, and ranching history, particularly the role sheep ranching has played in Sweet Grass County.
Curator and native Sweet Grass County resident, Rita Esp, said, “Sheep were such a part of this county. Sheep are still here. And people like hearing about sheep, so I can’t see us taking [the sheep exhibit] down” (personal communication, September 2013). The current sheep exhibit extensively covers the history of the industry in Sweet Grass County. It includes topics such as Gallatin National Forest permit holders and their herders and camptenders between 1939 and 1973, the local shearing crews, the woolen mill, life for herders in the mountains, and the changes the industry has experienced as a result of wars and changing markets and policies.

Museums enhance visitors’ awareness of a community’s heritage (Uzzell 1996). If visited by locals, museums can have the same effect. One of the Crazy Mountain Museum’s goals is to make the museum relevant to the community and involve the community in its efforts to collect, preserve, and share their heritage. They do this by reaching out to the community for family histories, artifacts, and photos. The museum shares the stories and histories of their place on social media and in the local newspaper. Events, such as music shows, pie and chili feeds, and holiday tours, hosted at the museum also bring in locals. Local children visit the museum on school trips. With a mission to educate not only visitors but locals, too, the Crazy Mountain Museum plays a role in fostering Sweet Grass County’s place identity, as it is a storehouse for family and community stories.

Family: The Halversons

Part of what helps a place identity connected to sheep ranching endure in Sweet
Grass County are the individual families that continue to raise sheep and those that have a tradition of raising sheep. Ranching memoirs and previous qualitative ranching research make visible the strong sense of family and belonging to a place many ranching families possess (Dominy 2000; Knight et al. 2000; Knapp and Fernandez-Gimenez 2008).

Some of the early sheep ranchers in Sweet Grass County made their money and left. Other families stayed, and developed a connection to the land and the sheep ranching way of life. They created memories and experiences in the Sweet Grass landscapes. With distinct invisible landscapes, meaning and attachment to the land and lifestyle grew. The Halverson family near Greycliff, Montana is one family that has a strong attachment to the land and lifestyle (Figure 3-23). “I could never get rid of the sheep. It’s in my blood. My great-grandpa, grandpa, dad, me. We’ve always had sheep,” Kevin Halverson reflected as we drove along a rutted path on a cool November afternoon trying to locate his sheep (personal communication, October 3, 2012).
Kevin is a fourth-generation sheep rancher. His great-grandfather, Jacob Halverson, trailed a band of sheep into present-day Sweet Grass County in 1883 with two of his brothers. Kevin’s grandparents, Ronald and Mabel, managed to hold onto their sheep during the 1930s when many area ranchers had to sell their livestock. When Jack, Kevin’s father, took over the ranch, Kevin joined him in running the family operation. Through low prices, difficult weather conditions, and changing regulations and policies, Kevin’s family has been continually involved in the sheep business since 1883. Today, Kevin and his wife Shirley run their sheep and cattle operation. Kevin hopes his son and grandson will be able to carry on the tradition.

Figure 3-23. The Halverson’s ranch sign shows a shepherder’s wagon and sheep, indicating their attachment to the sheep industry. Photo by author, September 10, 2013.
The Halversons’ Landscapes

In *This House of Sky*, Ivan Doig (1978, 13) wrote, “Any ranch in sight could start a story.” Doig was writing of his father, and because his father had spent a considerable amount of time working in the surrounding landscapes with people in the region, the ranches, or meadows, roads, and peaks, were familiar landscapes providing “tangible reminders of the past, solid anchors for memory” (Ryden 1993, 259). The memories and experiences are associated with specific places. For Kevin Halverson and his family, the surrounding landscapes the family has been working and living in are saturated with meaning. Memories and stories are anchored to specific places, from meals at the kitchen table to mountain ridges where their sheep were once trailed. An exploration of a local family’s involvement in the Sweet Grass County sheep ranching industry allows for a more in-depth understanding of how raising sheep has shaped the place and the memories that are fixed to the landscapes. In a study of ranching memoirs, the authors (Knapp and Fernanez-Gimenez 2008, 153) concluded that, “ranch memoirs show that landscapes are saturated with historical and social meanings for ranchers, creating a deep sense of connection to both places and management practices.” The Halversons have not published a memoir, but by listening to their stories, it is apparent that the landscapes Kevin and his family have been living and working in, are filled with meaning. To outsiders, a particular meadow may look like other surrounding meadows, but to Kevin Halverson, that specific meadow has historical significance and personal meaning. On a smaller scale, the kitchen landscape is also filled with family memories related to sheep ranching.
The House: Stepping into the Halverson kitchen, one is immediately aware of the family’s fondness and involvement with sheep. Photographs, paintings, recently dyed wool waiting to be spun, and everyday sheep-talk fill the living space. Kevin and Shirley’s grandson sits in the living room with white, yellow, and orange golf balls around him. The different colored golf balls represent sheep and fences. Their grandson rotates the sheep between different spaces illustrating his knowledge of the way his family raises sheep. Besides the everyday or episodic events, there are annual events that bring family, neighbors, and hired help together in the kitchen and around the kitchen table.

On shearing day, it is expected that the shearing crew and all the help will be fed a filling lunch. Shirley Halverson has been preparing a noon meal for the shearing crew for many years. While some of the family prefer to help with the moving and shearing of the sheep at the sheds, others stay at the house and assist in preparing snacks and the main noon meal for the large crew that will need to be fed. When the noon meal is ready, men and women crowd around the kitchen table and fill their plates full of meat, salads, breads, and dessert. Talk is lighthearted as they enjoy a break from the constant shearing of sheep and baling of wool. As soon as the meal is finished, the shearers head back to work. Shirley, and those helping her, clean up and begin talking about what to bring down for an afternoon snack and what to cook for supper for the crew that will stay for the evening meal.

Shearing day brings a large number of people into the Halverson kitchen. It is an annual affair and one that is planned for in advance. It is not, however, the only time the
kitchen and dining area are places of sheep-talk. Everyday, ordinary discussions that occur around the table also contribute to its meaning. Discussions of moving the rams to where the ewes are grazing, training new puppies, meetings with ranch management specialists, upcoming sheep and wool conventions, and whether the herder from Peru will be to the ranch in time for lambing are important topics that affect the Halverson ranching operation. Conversations relating to the everyday happenings and local, regional, national, and international sheep and wool news do not have the fanfare and bustle of sheep shearing day, but they are, nonetheless, a vital part of keeping the ranch in business. The kitchen table is a place of importance. The oval wood table is a place where the Halversons have laughed with family and friends during the shearing day meals and a place where worries over lamb and wool prices and weather conditions are talked about. It is an ordinary, small landscape, but one that is a storehouse of personal memories.

The Ranch: The sheep business is an extended family affair, especially at shearing time. Children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren come to the Halverson ranch from out of town and down the road to experience such events and bond with other family members. While some of the children and grandchildren prefer to help back at the house with preparing snacks, lunch, and dinner for the large crew, others remain around the sheep. Kevin’s grandson helps move the sheep into a single file where they wait to be sheared (Figure 3-24). His grandson takes every opportunity to be around the sheep and each of the activities, from shearing and lambing to everyday feedings. Shirley commented that he’s “just so open to learning and asking questions” (personal communication, July 24, 2013). He’s immersed in the raising of sheep, and at a young
age, he’s able to tell the difference between various wool types (Figure 3-25). After showing his grandson coarser and finer wool examples, Kevin laughed and said, “He knows just as much as me!” (personal communication, March 9, 2015).

Figure 3-24. Kevin Halverson’s grandson helps during shearing day. Photo by author, March 9, 2015.
Every member of the Halverson family has memories of lambing season at the lambing sheds just down the road from the main house. Shirley recalls checking on the lambing ewes in the middle of the night and visiting the sheds frequently to water the sheep (personal communication, April 4, 2013). Kevin and Shirley’s grandson looks forward to lambing season and visiting the lambing sheds after school every day. One year, Kevin recalled a story where his grandson named one of the bum lambs Tiny (personal communication, April 4, 2013). Since Tiny was stuck in a small pen inside the shed, Kevin’s grandson would occasionally pick him up and walk around with him, showing him the place since he could not see it from inside his pen. The Halversons have memories of long days and nights at the lambing sheds. They also have memories of
disaster. In 2011, the lambing sheds and surrounding area were flooded. Kevin recalled two feet of sand being left in the buildings after the water receded. New fence had to be installed. A water line on the sheds serves as a reminder of the flood and the work put into the place.

The Countryside: Creeks, Mountains, Gulches, Lakes, and Meadows: Kent Ryden (1993) showed that attachment to a landscape comes from multiple activities. Kevin’s experiences in the Sweet Grass landscape come from not only sheep ranching, but cattle ranching, hunting, fishing, and taking his children and grandchildren out into the mountains. While driving around the land where his livestock have grazed, Kevin shared memories of searching for a couple of lost cows with his neighbor all day on foot and horse through snow and rough terrain.

Gulches, creeks, peaks, and basins are not simply beautiful landscapes for Kevin. With over 500 ewes and 700 lambs being raised on the Halverson’s ranch and grazing more than 1,000 acres of Halverson land and additional acres that they lease, Kevin has many place-based memories associated with sheep near Lower Deer Creek and the Gallatin National Forest. Kevin pointed to ridge lines and reminisced about sheep getting too hot and not wanting to move further on down the trail (November 20, 2012). He recalled the route in the Gallatin National Forest his family used during the 1960s to trail their sheep over Elk Mountain, Boone’s Peak, Squaw Peak, Clover Basin, and Moccasin Lake. He still remembers the cloud of dust from all of the sheep on the way to Moccasin Lake. Although Squaw Peak was renamed Morning Star Peak in 2004, Kevin’s memories are associated with its earlier name (Bozeman Daily Chronicle 2004, 13 April).
Reminiscing about place-based memories also prompted memories of “Mud Hole” where they set up sheep camp every year. “Mud Hole” is associated with sheep memories, but other experiences are anchored to the place as well. He and his family frequently went back to “Mud Hole” during the hunting season as they knew the area well.

While standing outside near Kevin’s lambing sheds, he began pointing in different directions towards various creeks.

Everyone here had a band of sheep. That creek was all Esps. Everybody on the creek was an Esp, and they all had sheep. Here, grandpa had sheep. And his half-brother would have had sheep. Grosfields had sheep. And you go on the other creek, there were sheep. Mothersheads had sheep. They lived on Bridger Creek. I mean, everybody had some. And some was probably 500. And now, none of those people have any. I’m the only one (personal communication, April 4, 2013).

The landscape surrounding Kevin’s place used to be sheep country, and he still remembers the sheeping community and sheep along the creeks.

Although many of the surrounding landscapes no longer have sheep, the Halversons are continuing to make memories on their land. Shirley recalled one day when they were moving the sheep, and her grandson asked to walk behind the sheep instead of ride on the four-wheeler. She said, “He walked up there, and down here, and he’s back and forth. Got back in the pick-up and he said, Grandpa, did I look like a shepherd up there?” (personal communication, July 24, 2013). Together, the Halverson family is adding more stories onto the landscape, and as a result, they are creating a greater level of place connection (Knapp and Fernandez-Gimenez 2008).

The Town: Big Timber: With a multi-generational family history in the business, memories and stories have been passed from one generation to the next. Kevin frequently
recalls the stories his father told him of the large gatherings in Big Timber of past Sweet Grass County Wool Growers annual meetings in the 1940s. “It was a party! Everybody wanted to attend” (November 20, 2012). With 145 wool growers participating in the Sweet Grass County Wool Pool in 1941, the annual meeting was much louder than the most recent wool pool meetings where all the members can fit around one large table (Big Timber Pioneer 1941, 20 February).

The sheep industry has experienced several changes through the generations. Kevin reflected on the changing herder situation. When he was a kid, local sheepherders gathered at various bars and hotels in Big Timber. Ranchers went to these establishments to find help. Kevin said, “You went into the bar in Big Timber, and there were three or four of them sitting there that were looking for work” (personal communication, August 17, 2013). One of the men they hired from a bar worked for them for 13 years. Today, when Kevin needs a herder for part of the year, he finds them through the Mountain Plains Association that connects him to international workers that help for approximately nine month stints. The relationship between sheepherders, ranchers, and the local community has consequently changed. Rarely do Sweet Grass ranchers find local herders that are involved in the community and have family ties to the place. Rather, when a herder is needed, they come from another country, speak little English, and are rarely immersed in the local community. Although they may not be immersed in the community, some of them do become like family to the ranchers. Kevin recalled one of the Spanish herd who worked with him who had a stroke and went back to live with his family. “It was devastating. He was such a good guy and a good hand. I lost my
enthusiasm when I lost him. It was a tough day” (personal communication, August 17, 2013).

The Halversons have been and remain connected to Big Timber through community events, the local school, and other community establishments. In 2002, Montana State University recognized Kevin as an “Outstanding Agricultural Leader” citing his accomplishments as a sheep and wool grower, a beef cattle producer, and his role as a community leader. He has been active with organizations such as the Sweet Grass County Wool Marketing Association Board, the Crazy Mountain Stockgrowers Association, the Sweet Grass Conservation District, and a member of the Sweet Grass County High School Board. Kevin and Shirley’s children were raised in the community and participated in 4-H and local sporting events, such as track and bull riding. When their children were younger, Kevin and Shirley spent years as local 4-H leaders. Although their children are grown, they are still familiar faces at community events and summer 4-H fairs where their grandson now shows sheep.

Family, Place, Heritage, and Products

Sweet Grass County ranchers have adapted to the changing prices, policies, and overall circumstances in different ways. Some, such as Gene and Mary Langhus, have focused on meticulously keeping records of their farm flock by tracking milk production, fleece weight, and overall growth in order to improve genetics. They then sell their rams and ewes as breeding stock to commercial operators (Big Timber Pioneer 2015, 30 April). One way the Halverson family has adapted is by abandoning the selling of products only in conventional markets. Rather, he and two other ranching families
founded Montana Natural Lamb, a cooperative of multi-generational family ranches. They sell lamb meat directly to individuals, grocery stores, and restaurants throughout Montana. Part of the marketing and promotion of their products involves promoting and selling their heritage, a growing trend among agriculturists and other businesses. This trend has assisted in “revitalizing marginalized farming communities” (Mansfield 2012, 73). Additionally, ranchers, such as the Halversons, have benefitted from neolocalism and the promotion of local connections to products (Schnell 2013). Montana Natural Lamb ties consumers to the local by emphasizing the connection between the product, the land, and the family.

Each Halverson generation has faced different obstacles to overcome in order to stay in the business, including low prices, new allotment regulations, labor challenges, and changing markets. Encountering natural hazards is part of sheep ranching in Sweet Grass County. Ranchers experience such hazards as lightning storms, blizzards, and droughts. In addition to natural hazards, sheep ranchers also must work with changing policies, predators, and labor issues. Those who stay in the business have learned to adapt in different ways. For the Halverson family, Kevin matter-of-factly said they “problem solve their way through weather, politics, and predators” (personal communication, October 3, 2012). The Halversons have had to adapt in order to sustain their way of life and keep their sheep ranching traditions alive. Montana Natural Lamb is one way in which they adapted. One of his hopes is to stay in the business and make it profitable not only for himself, but for future generations. The Halverson family has worked to find a way to sustain their way of life and keep their sheep ranching traditions alive.
Promotional and creative representations of localities can also yield insights into place identity (Shortridge 1991; Gumprecht 1998; Robertson 2001; Baker 2003; Wyckoff 2013). Postcards, for example, have been used to show environmental changes through the years (Sawyer and Butler 2006), how companies have used the images and certain techniques in their production to represent and promote places such as Grand Canyon National Park (Youngs 2012), and how cities, such as Boston, have used postcards in tourism and place commodification (Corkery and Bailey 1996). The picture postcard is thought to capture and depict everyday life in a particular place. Although just a snapshot of one scene, they are viewed as representations of the larger area (Arreola and Burkhart 2010). Postcards are common forms of media, either for locals to send to outsiders or for visitors to retain memories of a place they have visited. With their popularity, postcards have the power to shape attitudes about people and places (Arreola 2006).

Before traveling was as common and easy as it is today, photographic postcards provided people with visual access to places that otherwise would be available only by others’ narrative accounts or by personal travel (Schwartz 1996). They were viewed as accurately depicting a place. One postcard from Big Timber in 1948, titled “The Wooly West,” shows sheep being trailed along the Boulder River south of Big Timber (Northern Rockies Heritage Center). On the back of the card, the sender wrote, “This is a familiar scene in June, up to the mts, and Sept. - home again....” (Figure 3-26). The sender shared a “familiar” image of Sweet Grass County with an outsider, thereby helping to foster the image of Sweet Grass County as sheep country.
Today, the Crazy Mountain Museum’s gift shop has several sheep-themed cards and postcards for sale. Some postcards are older photos, including one where local resident Lawrence Allestad leads a band of sheep down McLeod Avenue in Big Timber on the way to high country summer grazing lands. Contemporary artists also depict sheep in their work. A recurring theme in regional artist Kara Tripp’s work is sheep. The museum sells cards of some of her sheep-themed prints. Although Tripp’s works are not
set in a specific Sweet Grass landscape, sheep characters symbolize Sweet Grass County. Whether reaching a small audience or a large one, films also communicate cultural messages about places (Baker 2003). While sheep still retain their negative image as environmentally harmful among many, there has been an increasing interest by some in the practice of raising sheep as a way of protecting and saving a traditional way of life that is slowly disappearing. In response to this, filmmakers Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor produced an independent documentary titled *Sweetgrass: An unsentimental elegy to the American West*. The film followed Lawrence and Elaine Allestad over multiple seasons as they trailed their sheep through the Boulder Valley to the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. With no narration, the film sought to capture the everyday trials and reality of the sheep business in the American West and how the West is changing. Raising sheep in Sweet Grass County today is different than it was in the late 1800s or even in the 1950s. Trailing sheep long distances into the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness no longer occurs. The Allestads were the last ranching family to do so, and Barbash and Castaing-Taylor were able to document and preserve what was once a common way of life for sheep ranchers in the county.

Elaine Allestad said when Lucien Castaing-Taylor first came to visit them and see if his sheep project would even work, he wanted to really get the feel for the way of life (personal communication, July 10, 2013). He decided his first night there, he wanted to sleep in their sheep wagon. He proceeded to come back to film during different seasons for several years. Because the filming was ongoing for multiple years, Elaine said pretty soon, they did not even notice the microphones attached to them. Castaing-Taylor built a
relationship with the Allestads and their herders which helps make the documentary more authentic because the characters are not filtering their conversations.

While some scholars have argued that films obscure reality (Hopkins 1994), Castaing-Taylor’s goal was to record, not direct, the film, as he wanted to capture everyday life for the sheep ranchers and herders in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. In order to do that, he decided against narrating the film and instead let the audience interpret the stories that were being shown (Big Timber Pioneer 2010, 6 May). He spent countless hours hiking and recording sounds and scenes in order to capture the feel of the place and the sheep ranching traditions. Castaing-Taylor recorded 200 hours of footage on the Allestad ranch and throughout Sweet Grass County as the sheep were moved from lambing grounds to the mountains. He and his wife had to edit the film to two hours. He acknowledged that it is not possible to fully represent real life in a film, especially one that must be limited in duration. The participants in the film, however, have praised the film, saying, “it’s as authentic as you can do” (Big Timber Pioneer 2010, 6 May).

Indeed, other locals have acknowledged that they believe Sweetgrass does portray the place and sheep ranching traditions accurately. Elaine Allestad said she appreciates the lack of narration as it depicts “just pure, real ranching” (Billings Gazette 2010, 14 February). The most common complaint about the film from locals is the obscene language used by one of the herders. While many of them acknowledge that it does show everyday life, they feel the foul-language scenes take away from the film and are not necessary to accurately depict the sheep business. It is also more difficult to show to their children and grandchildren. Others suggest that when they were around herders in the
past, they never heard that type of language spoken. They argue the cussing scenes misrepresent the life of a sheepherder. But Pat Connolly, the sheepherder featured in the foul-language scene, said he had people come up to him and say, “‘Hey, I do this too once a week.’ It's life” (Big Timber Pioneer 2010, 6 May). Nobody’s experiences and perceptions of a way of life are identical, even sheep ranchers in Sweet Grass County.

Films have the power to shape people’s perceptions of places, whether they have been there or not. They have been especially powerful influencers in the ways people perceive the American West (Hausladen 2006). While some documentaries do not reach a wide audience, thereby limiting the impact the film has on outsiders’ perceptions, people from all around the world have watched *Sweetgrass*. The film was first released in Paris in 2009 and has been shown at film festivals in Berlin, Vancouver, and New York (Billings Gazette 2010, 14 February). Although many of the viewers may not know exactly where Sweet Grass County is located, the film does shape their perceptions of the region’s identity and life in south-central rural Montana. Spanish herders from the Pyrenees Mountains and German herders were able to watch how American herders live and found many similarities (Big Timber Pioneer 2010, 6 May).

The film has also reached viewers within the United States. At the Crazy Mountain Museum, curators sell copies of the DVD to visitors of the museum. By promoting the film to visitors, visitors from elsewhere in Montana and the United States are given the message that Sweet Grass was, and in part remains, sheep country. *Sweetgrass* has helped shape the place identity of Sweet Grass County.
Conclusion

An old adage goes, “You raise cattle for prestige and sheep for the money.” While this may be true for some in Sweet Grass’s past, other area ranchers had, and continue to have, a love for raising sheep. The goal of modern-day obituaries is generally to give a succinct description of a person’s life, who they were, and what they were most passionate about. Sweet Grass County obituaries often mention people’s involvement and fondness for sheep and the industry (Big Timber Pioneer 2002, 18-24 January; 2006, 12-18 May; 2006, 3-9 November; 2007, 18-24 May; 2007, 22-28 June; 2007, 17-23 August). Family stories, presented in oral or written format, are other sources of information for exploring the fondness of sheep to local individuals and families. A family story from the 1920s preserved at the Crazy Mountain Museum illustrates such affection for the industry. “Evelyn asked A.M. if he had a hobby. She sensed that he probably didn’t know what the word meant, so she clarified it. ‘I mean, what do you like to do best?’ A.M. lit up and exclaimed, ‘Oh, to raise sheep!’”

Part of the reason Sweet Grass residents have such pride in their heritage is because it was a way of life that was valued by so many in the community. Even as they focus on the more recent tourism sector of the economy, Sweet Grass manages to embrace and connect their sheep ranching heritage with their tourism goals. The sheep mural was promoted in part to bring in tourists off the interstate who appreciate public art (Big Timber Pioneer 2007, 8-14 June). The museum attracts tourists, and they have chosen to include a large sheep and wool exhibit as an introduction for outsiders to Sweet Grass County history and life. Even if many locals do not know the finer details of the
history of sheep ranching in Sweet Grass County, they know it is a significant part of the local narrative.

This area was built on the sheep industry. For many families, being involved in the sheep industry was how they got their start in Sweet Grass County. This is evident by visiting their museum with an entire room dedicated to the family histories of the longtime residents there. Even today, with the industry “in transition,” the communities in Sweet Grass County still remember. And one significant reason they are able to remember is because of the landscape surrounding them. The sheep art, the wagons, the mascot, the gift shop filled with sheep memorabilia all sends a message to long time and recent residents as well as outsiders that sheep ranching was and still is important their place.

It is not only the visible landscape that contributes to Sweet Grass’s place identity. For those with experience raising sheep, invisible landscapes from the past also contribute to how they experience that place today. Social memories are another aspect of place identity, and they are shared amongst people over coffee or while attending a sheep shearing gathering, at school reunions where the “Sheepherder” spirit endures, and through community histories on exhibit at the museum and in the local newspaper. The social memories that have endured, however, tend to be more positive aspects of the industry and have nurtured a place identity that is more celebratory of the past. Sweet Grass has been shaped by sheep ranching since the nineteenth century. Only some of the narratives, however, are part of the community’s social memories. Despite the selectivity of narratives, they are still significant for their role in shaping and defining Sweet Grass’s
place identity in the twenty-first century as a community that embraces their sheep ranching traditions.
During the 2013 National Basque Festival in Elko, Nevada, I visited the Star Hotel, a Basque restaurant. It was filled with people laughing and sharing stories. Patrons spoke a mixture of Basque and English, ate lamb and beef dinners, and drank the Basque cocktail of the West, the picon punch. Soon, the accordions and castanets appeared and music and dancing ensued (Figure 4-1). One middle-aged man who was playing the castanets said his father came to the West as a sheepherder. He shared stories of growing up and getting together frequently with other former herders to eat, drink, play music, and dance. “I can’t imagine life without these gatherings,” he said (personal communication, July 6, 2013). Permanent fixtures in the restaurant include vintage wall photos showing herders baking bread out on the range, families docking and castrating lambs, and sheep dotting the sparse northern Nevada landscape. They serve as reminders to locals and visitors of the role sheep ranching has played in the settlement of the Basques in the region. The Star’s menu includes a brief history of Basques in Elko County, their association with sheepherding, and the role of the Star Hotel as a home away from home. Most visitors to the restaurant are generally aware of the Basque association with sheepherding in the American West. Indeed, many had personal stories, from visiting sheep camps during the summer for Sunday picnics to simply growing up in Elko with the Basques and seeing The Star filled with herders.
Across town at the Fairgrounds where the official National Basque Festival was held earlier in the day, the scene was different. The demographic was much younger, and many of them did not speak the Basque language. When two Basque bertsolaritza poets sang speaking the Basque language, the words were only understood by a minority of the crowd. There was still an intense pride in identifying as “Basque,” but personal stories of herding sheep or visiting sheep camps were uncommon among the younger generation. Although the sharing of social memories was not as prevalent, there were other reminders of the Basques’ association with sheep in the American West, such as images of sheep on t-shirts, hats, and household decorations that were for sale, stories of the sheep ranching
past in the festival program, and advertisements for a Basque arborglyph (aspen carvings) exhibit at the local museum.

The story of sheep ranching in Elko County is a layered narrative involving Basques and non-Basques. Both groups were raising sheep in the same landscapes, but their experiences differed in significant ways. Based on their distinctive experiences, their sense of place and their sheep ranching heritage also differed. The Basques have visibly incorporated their experiences as shepherders, ranchers, and hotel keepers into their traditions, and consequently, shaped northeastern Nevada and the greater American West in enduring ways through festivals, landscapes, foodways, and symbols. This chapter focuses on the experiences of the Basques and Basque-Americans and their role in shaping the land and life in and around Elko County, Nevada.

The Basques in the American West

The Basques are a people without a nation-state. Their homeland is in the Pyrenees Mountains with four provinces in Spain and three in France. During the nineteenth century, rural Basques lived on mixed-farming family farms that were small and mostly subsistence based. Some families raised flocks of sheep consisting of one hundred or fewer animals. They did not, however, practice transhumance as it was done in the American West. Rather, when the sheep were grazing on hillsides away from the farm, they were still within walking distance to the homestead (Douglass and Bilbao 1975).
Several push factors contributed to the Basque migration to the American West. Economic reasons pushed some Basques away from their homeland. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Basque Country was facing an agricultural crisis, and many were impoverished (Idarraga 2016). Further, it was only the eldest son that inherited the family estate leaving other siblings few choices that would result in substantial economic gains. As a result, Basques, males especially, migrated to the American West where they had heard of success stories from relatives and friends (Douglass and Bilbao 1975; Idarraga 2016).

The American West “pulled” many Basque immigrants as well. America provided opportunity for wealth and freedom. The Basques began migrating to the American West during the California gold rush of 1848. Some of the earliest Basques migrated from South America where they engaged in mining and agriculture, including large-scale sheep ranching. The migration stream from South America was not long lasting however, and the majority of Basques soon migrated directly from the Basque Country (Douglass and Bilbao 1975). Upon reaching California, they realized there was more opportunity and room for growth and success in agriculture rather than the overcrowded mines. Some Basque men of means began raising sheep and sought help from their fellow countrymen as herders. Soon, with the sheep industry on the rise, non-Basque ranchers also sought the Basques as competent sheepherders, and the Basque presence began to spread throughout the West as the sheep industry expanded.

Douglass and Bilbao (1975) and Campbell (1985) trace the spread of Basque sheepmen from southern California in the early 1850s to the northeast corner of the state
by 1890 (Figure 4-2). As the sheep industry continued to expand, ranchers and Basque shepherders moved from California to other states in the West. During the late 1860s and into the 1870s, Basque sheepmen moved into northern Nevada and southeastern Oregon. The Boise area and southern Idaho experienced the Basque presence during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Although Basques were employed in other areas of the West, such as Wyoming, Montana, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah, their involvement was more localized and limited compared to their participation in California, Nevada, Oregon, and Idaho.
Figure 4-2. Basque migration in the American West (Campbell 1985).
Sheep Ranching History of Basques in Elko County

Byrd Sawyer (1971, 15) recognized the importance of sheep to the state of Nevada when he wrote, “it is strange that the Great Seal of the State of Nevada shows no sheep. Somehow, down the years, ranching, the key to prosperity through most of Nevada history, has been taken for granted or overlooked completely.” Sheep trails cut across Nevada beginning in the 1850s. By 1890, sheepmen trailed over two million sheep from California through northern Nevada (Echeverria 1999). Rather than the physical environment attracting sheepmen, it was the mining camps that initiated sheep settlement in the region. Sheepmen trailed and established the first large numbers of sheep in western Nevada from California and Oregon (Wentworth 1948).

In northeastern Nevada, Elko County did not experience large numbers of permanent sheep until the 1870s when some trail drivers decided to remain in the region instead of continuing moving on to Montana and Wyoming (Lane 1974; Starrs 1998). By this time, the Basques had been herding in California and western Nevada and had established themselves as the finest sheepherders in the American West (Douglass and Bilbao 1975). While non-Basque ranchers were aware of the Basque reputation as fine sheepherders, the earliest Basque-owned ranches in northeastern Nevada, such as the Spanish Ranch owned by the Altubes and the YP Ranch owned by the Garats, laid a solid foundation for Basque immigration to the region (Idarraga 2016). As more Basques migrated to northeastern Nevada, they typified the pattern of chain migration (Weidel 2001). Brothers, cousins, friends, and other relatives sent for one another claiming there was opportunity in the American West to make money.
Many Basques did make money. Some took their money and returned to their homeland. Others stayed to make their home in America. The majority only remained in the sheep business temporarily and then found opportunity elsewhere, such as in business, mining, banking, politics, and finances. Basques who remained in the livestock industry, however, continued to have a considerable impact on Basque immigration to Nevada. Basque herders who established themselves, bought land, and climbed the livestock ladder, sent for Basque herders from the Old Country. Other area ranchers also continued to seek out Basque sheepherders. Therefore, with a considerable number of Basque herders in the region, even those Basques who left the sheep industry and opened up other businesses were still tied to their fellow Basque sheepherders because herding wages supported many businesses (Ruiz 1964).

The influx of Basque immigrants coincides with the growth of the sheep industry and labor shortages in the industry. Between 1890 and 1920, the largest numbers of Basque migrants arrived in the American West (Ruiz 1964; Idarraga 2016). This was in part because there was demand for Basque sheepherders. The 1921 and 1924 Immigration Acts, however, are also part of the reason Basque immigration to the American West declined. The Acts limited immigration from Spain with a lower quota. While Nevada sheep ranchers felt the impact of the immigration policies by the mid-1920s, it took several years for the Basque herders already here to retire, die, or return to Europe. Further, many itinerant sheepherders were out of business with the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 and went to work as herders for established sheep ranches (Douglass and Bilbao 1975).
By the early 1940s, sheep ranchers were feeling the full impact of fewer Basque immigrants. World War II created a demand for agricultural products, including sheep products, but ranchers needed more herders. The sheep ranchers turned to their senators who in turn worked to sponsor legislation to bring in more Basque herders. Nevada Senator Patrick McCarran, who had worked with sheep and interacted with the Basque community growing up, was instrumental in working with sheepmen and importing Basque immigrants to work as herders during the 1940s and 1950s (Douglass and Bilbao 1975; Idarraga 2016). In 1952, McCarran’s “Sheepherder Bill” was passed allowing special quota immigration visas to be available for Basque sheepherders. Many Basque immigrants were eager to escape Francisco Franco’s Spain. They were welcomed in the American West as many in the public saw them as “natural-born sheepherders” (Idarraga 2016).

The passing of new bills allowing the legal entry of Basque sheepherders helped Nevada sheepmen. During the 1950s and 1960s, Basque immigrants continued to migrate to Elko County’s unfamiliar landscapes that were filled with sagebrush and sheep. Their numbers, however, were much smaller than the peak immigration period of the early twentieth century as there were far fewer sheep. By 1960, the Nevada sheep industry was threatened by developments other than labor shortages. Numbers of sheep dropped throughout the state, including in Elko County, and have not recovered (Figure 4-3). Many of the reasons parallel the story in other parts of the West, such as tighter environmental regulations on public lands, predator issues, changing national markets,
difficulty selling their products especially with the rise of synthetic fibers, and rising international competition.

Figure 4-3. Sheep numbers for Elko County, 1880-2012 (USBC 1880-2012).

Sheep operations in northeastern Nevada followed a predictable path on the range. During an interview with DeLoyd Satterthwaite, he summed up range operations by saying, “We were on the move all the time. We sheared outside. We did everything else outside” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). Disregarding “tramp herders” who were continually on the move and had little regard for consistency, sheepmen followed consistent routes year after year (Figure 4-4). With the creation of allotments by the Forest Service and later the Bureau of Land Management, routes were even more established. During the summer, herders moved the sheep around the high mountain meadows. The Ruby Mountains provided grass and brush for between 80,000 and 100,000 sheep in 1905, and after regulations were in place, approximately 30,000 sheep
grazed in the Rubies in 1907 (Lane 1974). In northern Elko County, sheep grazed the Independence Mountains and the mountains in the present-day Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest around the towns of Mountain City and Jarbidge (Wooton 1932). The northern Elko County mountain ranges became “sheep country” (Figure 4-5) (Hochmuth et al. 1942). As the weather cooled, the sheep moved down into the valleys and moved southward to the winter range, only to repeat the loop as the weather warmed. Many routes began in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest before moving southward. One popular route in the late 1930s began in the northern Elko County mountain ranges and moved southward, across the Ruby Mountains, and then into southern Elko County and northern White Pine County. Another common route began in the same region and ended in White Pine and Nye Counties for the winter. A less common route because the carrying capacity was much lower took sheep from the summer grazing area of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest to the winter ranges found in Pershing, Churchill, and Lander counties (Hochmuth et al. 1942). The routine was predictable for seasoned herdsmen and their sheep.
Figure 4-4. Major seasonal sheep movements in Intermountain Region, 1938-1939 (United States 1939).
Not only was the route itself predictable, but the activities that occurred along the way were also consistent. As the sheep were trailed, herders and camptenders set up “sheep camp” along the way, which was a temporary home base for the herder that included a shelter that could range from a simple bedroll in the open to a tent or a wagon. Camp also consisted of a place for a fire, provisions, such as coffee, water, and food, and any other supplies, such as an ax for chopping wood, a shovel, and a rifle. For some outfits, sheep camps were usually set up in the same spots along the route. During a conversation with Pete Paris, a third generation Basque sheep rancher, he said, “There is always a reason a camp is where it is at, and that is usually because of visibility or water”
(personal communication, July 8, 2014). The other seasonal round of activities, such as shearing, shipping, and lambing, also took place in the same region year after year. In terms of range operations in northeastern Nevada, much remains the same as it did in the past. While there are far fewer sheep today, the remaining sheep are still trailed hundreds of miles on historical migration routes utilizing public lands, and shearing and lambing are still done outside on the range.

Sheep Landscapes

Several distinctive elements define the traditional northeastern Nevada sheep landscape. They are significant both as key visual components that remain in fragmented form today as well as for anchoring place-based and cultural meanings that help define this way of life. Basque men and women, as a result of their roles in the sheep industry, have impacted both urban and rural landscapes in Elko County.

Open Range

Nevada’s vast open spaces and livestock ranges remain a defining element in the sheep landscape. Northeastern Nevada is known for its combination of wide-open spaces and higher mountain ranges. It was home to over 250,000 sheep in the past. Accompanying those sheep were herders, many of them Basque, who walked hundreds of miles with the sheep each year. As they walked, they learned all about the terrain and what the land had to offer. Owners of the flocks sometimes drive more than a hundred miles each week to bring water to the sheep during times of drought. They all have stories anchored to particular landscapes. When I asked one Elko sheepman if he has
stories tied to the landscape he has worked in, he said matter-of-factly, “Well, yeah. Doesn’t everybody?” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). In *Sweet Promised Land* (1957, 49), Nevada native, Robert Laxalt, writes, “…in rapid succession, he saw other ranges and deserts, each of which seemed to call up a time out of the past.” Elko sheepmen, too, can recall times of the past when they see familiar landscapes. Whether on foot, horse, or in a vehicle, former and current Basque sheepmen are familiar with the landscape and have many stories anchored to specific Nevada places, from trucks breaking down in remote areas to passing the time during the day fishing local creeks.

Upon arriving in the region, the Basques encountered a different environment from their homeland. Nevada is Basin and Range country with mountain chains interspersed between miles and miles of dry, open grazing lands (Figure 4-6). Upon arrival, the immigrants were met with oceans of sagebrush rather than water. Mountains were in the distance, unlike their living situation in the Basque provinces where they lived in the Pyrenees Mountains. Joe Sarasua arrived in Elko in 1948. Reflecting back to his first impression of Elko, he remembered being shocked. “It is a lot different from the ocean and when I got here, I think, What am I doing? From where I come from it is green all year round. So green. But here all sagebrush. It was hard at first because the customs are so different. It was really, really rough for me to herd the sheep, to stay out in the hills, but once I come I don’t want to go back” (Hadley 1980, 40). Other Basques have echoed similar sentiments of forlornness and shock after arriving in Nevada to tend sheep. One former herder said, “At first, life was sad, sad” (personal communication, March 10, 2014). Nicolas Fagoago reminisced with more details about his short time as a
herder in Nevada. “I came here and was very sad for me…You’ll get used to it [they told me]. But no, I didn’t want to get used to this life. And those canyons, in between those mountains, you know? I would go with the sheep there. Rattle Snake Canyon. Those snakes are pure poison…Hard. It was hard” (Reig 2010). For many Basque men who migrated from their home country to Elko to herd sheep, the first encounter with the Nevada landscape remains a vivid memory. Much of the time, Basque herders recounted their first memory of the West as one of sadness and hardship.
Figure 4-6. Nevada’s Basin and Range country. Map by author.
Some Basque sheepmen, however, came to love the open ranges of northeastern Nevada. They became intimately familiar with the landscapes. Mikel Lopategui remembers his father, Jess, talking about the open space he encountered as a shepherder in Elko County. Although it was shocking at first, Mikel told me his father became accustomed to it and now feels confined when he visits the Basque provinces (personal communication, July 2014). Martin Hachquet Jr. spent much of his early life working in the sheep business with his parents. He grew to know the place, and was fond of the environment and the culture of northeastern Nevada. After many years visiting sheep camps and working with his family’s sheep, he “knew every mountain, creek, and spring between Eureka and Gold Creek” (Elko Daily Free Press 2015, 20 June).

Another sheepman who grew to love the open space was Francisco Goioechea. He was a sheepman in the early twentieth century, but went into the hotel business and later the livery business in Elko. He and his wife, Julianna, soon found, however, that they missed the open range. A newspaper article stated, “Land and sheep, open spaces and the people of the range were more to the tastes of their independent ways” (Elko Daily Free Press 1954, 28 December, 1). Love of land and sheep was passed onto Francisco and Julianna’s son, Jess.

Jess Goiochechea grew up in Elko and ran a sheep ranch until his retirement. In one retelling of his story, a relative said Jess “was destined to be a sheepman. He loved his sheep and the herders. That was his life. He learned the ‘country’ from his beginning - every nook and cranny of the North Fork to the Jarbidge ranges and beyond - every creek, every fence post, every side road, every rock, sheep ranch, cow range, the forest,
Jess knew it all… Over 50 years following the sheep” (NNM). Even after Jess retired in 1976, he could not completely separate himself from sheep. He continued to have a small flock of sheep near his home (Elko Daily Free Press 1993, 29 March).

Jose (Joe) Juaristi immigrated to Elko in 1948 to be employed as a sheepherder. Although he eventually left herding as a full-time job, his time as a herder is detailed at length in his obituary. While tending sheep as a young adult, Joe came to know and love the Nevada landscapes. The writers of his obituary claim that “he knew the mountains and valleys of Northern Nevada better than anyone.” As a result of his time walking hundreds of miles with the sheep over several years, he had many stories about the Nevada rangelands. His family and friends remember him puttering “around country roads in an old pickup with friends and relatives, pointing out a bush here, a creek there, and telling stories of his days with the herd” (Elko Daily Free Press 2016, 11 May). Jose’s brother, Juan, was also a sheepman in Nevada who had fond memories attached to the Elko County landscapes. A sheepherder for more than sixty years, Juan used to frequently sleep out on the range while tending sheep and watch the moon and stars, as they made him happy. Juan did not wear gloves and was not afraid of the cold, even in the winter, saying, “Der on da land, dat’s da best place. Feel life der” (Elko Daily Free Press 2012, 2 July). When he visited the Paris Ranch where he used to tend sheep, he looked around at the mountains and said, “I like to see all of this. I do” (Reig 2010). Juan spent decades walking the landscapes in and around Elko County. Before he died, he requested that his “ashes find a home around the sheep camps of Elko County, something
by a gurgling stream under the opaque light of a full moon” (Elko Daily Free Press 2012, 2 July).

Sheepmen who spent time in the mountains and the open range have a plethora of stories anchored to landscapes throughout Elko County. Those who simply lived around Elko, however, also have sheep-related scenes etched in their memories. Individuals who were around prior to the 1970s before sheep numbers dropped considerably, remember seeing the dust kicked up as sheep moved from one grazing area to the next. Regional artist, Larry Bute, said old timers used to describe the scenes as “sheep fires blazing,” and it was not uncommon to see at least a dozen of them from a high vantage point (personal communication, April 4, 2016).

**Sheep Camps**

Sheep camps, set within the vast open spaces of the region, were another critical element in the sheep landscape. On a small scale map, northeastern Nevada appears rather empty with its lack of major roads, urban centers, and only a smattering of small communities. With a large scale map, however, place names fill the spaces and “the seemingly empty [Nevada landscape] fills quickly with history and significance” (Ryden 1999, 522). Benchmark Maps, an atlas company specializing in the American West, chose to label former sheep camps on their maps. Neil Allen, an employee of Benchmark Maps, said they labeled the sheep camps because they are used as local landmarks that people refer to when giving directions (personal communication, January 16, 2014). The labeled sheep camps indicate that raising sheep played a significant role in shaping
northern Nevada. Although the majority of sheep camps are now abandoned, they still play a role in local life as people navigate the back roads of Elko County.

Basque herders remained with the sheep throughout the year. When the sheep moved, the herders moved. They set up a camp whenever they moved. Sheep camp, as the temporary home space came to be called, always consisted of a shelter for the herder. The camps served as a home base and were moved approximately every 7-10 days following the sheep to new grazing areas. With continual movement, housing needed to be mobile. The sheep wagon, an iconic symbol of the western sheepherder, provided shelter for Basque herders working in the Nevada basins. During the summer months when the sheep grazed the mountain meadows, a heavy canvas tent provided shelter for herders (Figure 4-7). Some herders, however, preferred or were only given a bedroll that was used to sleep on outside under the stars (Douglas and Bilbao 1975). Camp also typically had a stone fire ring nearby where the herder could start a fire to cook food or simply sit by it for warmth or enjoyment. Herders walked several slow miles a day. When something, such as a rock or other treasure, caught their eye, some would begin a “treasure” pile at camp or add to an existing “treasure” pile at camp. Before it became illegal to leave trash in the National Forest and Wilderness areas, Pete Paris said he remembers when some camps would have a tall pile of discarded cans (personal communication, July 2014). Depending on the ranch outfit, some herders had access to horses or mules. The horses would remain close to the camp when they were not being used to check and move the sheep.
The camp was a temporary home for Basque herders. During the day while the sheep were bedded down, the herder had some down time. Basque rancher, Pete Paris, told me his herders used this time to prepare meals, chop wood for the fire, find nearby aspen trees to carve, or sleep and rest (personal communication, July 2014). Sheep camp provided a place for the herder to relax and think, but it could also be a lonely space as Alberto Uranga said during his pondering about time as a herder. “It was tough. …how do you handle loneliness and solitude?” (Loeffler 2001, 7-8). Herders were secluded from much human contact, and based on both my personal interviews and archived interviews, most of them were thankful to see and talk with another human. Paris tells stories of herders providing coffee, bread, or stew for any friendly visitor. Linda Dufurrena had
Basque herders, and she recalled when they would visit sheep camp to drop off provisions, the herders “would run out, glad to see you. They would give you wine and bread” (Loeffler 2002, 53). They welcomed visitors to their modest home space and enjoyed meals and fellowship while eating and drinking under a big sky with vast views surrounding them.

Today, sheep camps still consist of tents during the summer, but during the winter months, most herders now live in contemporary campers. Similar to the past, it is still up to the rancher whether they provide a horse, mule, or pickup truck for the herders. The imprint on the landscape is subtle. Once the herder moves on to the next camp and takes his shelter, transportation, and belongings with him, there is little left. There may be a fire ring, a “treasure” pile, or a cleared area where the camper or tent was located. In general, however, the character of the sheep camp historically was and continues to be ephemeral in nature.

Some sheep ranching families in Elko had more permanent “sheep camps” near the base of the mountains. They called them summer homes. In general, the only shared characteristic with the herders’ sheep camps was that they functioned as a temporary home. In terms of infrastructure, the summer homes were permanent. Summer homes consisted of solidly built structures including the house, bunkhouse, food storage, and possibly other storage and housing structures. During an interview with Lorna Jones, she talked of the memories she has of spending her summers as a young girl out at the summer ranch with her family (personal communication, August 27, 2014). While sheep camp was the home for the herders, the sheep ranching family primarily used summer
homes. Summer homes allowed the sheep rancher and his family to be closer to the sheep when they were grazing the high mountain meadows. Lorna remembers visiting the herders at their sheep camps. Rarely did herders visit the summer home, unless a Basque family owned it. While the summer home was not the herder’s home, many times they did serve as the sheep camp headquarters where the camp tender would prepare food to bring to the various herders at their sheep camps.

**Bread Ovens**

Bread ovens were another predictable part of the sheep landscape. A frequent sheep camp ritual was the making of Basque sheepherder bread. Although this was most commonly done in a Dutch oven placed around hot coals buried in the ground, many of the major summer sheep camps were equipped with permanent round or beehive-shaped bread ovens made of bricks and cemented stones with a chimney at the back (Mallea-Olaetxe 2000). Often times, one camp tender was assigned to multiple herders in the vicinity. The camp tender would prepare multiple Dutch ovens and bake the loaves of bread in the beehive ovens (Figure 4-8). Once a week he would deliver a loaf of bread for each herder along with other provisions.
Figure 4-8. An abandoned bread oven sits near the 76 Creek Cabin sheep camp in northern Elko County. Photo by author, July 4, 2013.
While many bread ovens have decayed or been bulldozed by land developers, several remain. An abandoned bread oven sits at the site of a former sheep camp in the Copper Basin. Another bread oven was moved from the Columbia Basin in northern Elko County to the grounds of the Basque clubhouse in Elko in the 1990s when the Yellow Jacket Gold Mine planned to bulldoze the sheep camp and its oven (Mallea-Olaetxe 2000). During an interview with former camptender, Jess Lopategui, he reminisced about baking bread in the oven (personal communication, July 7, 2014). He recalled fitting nine ten pound Dutch ovens inside that he then distributed to the herders. The oven is still functional, and Jess occasionally uses it to make bread for local picnics.

Some sheep ranching families had summer homes closer to the mountains where they lived during the summer months. Sometimes the summer homes also served as the sheep camp headquarters. Lorna Jones remembers summers as a young girl at their summer home in the foothills of the Ruby Mountains near Secret Pass (personal communication, August 27, 2014). Her family used to bake with their bread oven throughout the summer. If there was a bread oven near the fall shipping point, it was also sure to be used. Kent and Cathy McAdoo remember seeing the Basque camptenders cooking large loaves of golden bread in the oven in the 1970s (personal communication, August 28, 2014).

The majority of the bread ovens that at one time received considerable use have either been removed or are quietly decaying. Instead of dough in Dutch ovens being placed inside the chambers, hunters or other recreationists have thrown their garbage in some of them. The art of baking with the large ovens has, for the most part, been lost.
Although, some former herders still take advantage of the oven at the Basque Club House and once again bake loaves of sheepherder’s bread (personal communication, July 7, 2014).

Sheepherder’s bread has become a part of the Basque culture in the American West. It is present at the Basque festivals, in Basque homes, and in Basque restaurants. Every Basque sheepherder is familiar with the bread and has memories of eating it if not daily, at least weekly, while herding sheep in the mountains and in the desert sagebrush. Although the ingredients are simple, all bread is not the same. Many former Basque herders can tell the difference between the traditionally baked bread in a bread oven or a pit in the ground, and bread baked in a conventional, home oven. They have had years of eating sheepherder’s bread and have developed a discerning palate.

Arborglyphs – Aspen Tree Carvings

The most conspicuous and copious features surrounding the Basque sheep camps and the paths sheepherders followed are aspen carvings, or arborglyphs (Figure 4-9). The tree carvings primarily appear near the summer grazing areas. Therefore, the smooth, carved bark from aspen trees are generally above 6,000 feet of elevation, along creek banks and wet meadows, and in canyons (Mallea-Olaetxe 1992). To occupy their time and mind, Basques commonly carved their names, dates, and their Basque homeland province (Figure 4-10). Themes of home were common, with carvings of Basque farmhouses and Basque symbols, such as flags and the Basque cross, or lauburu. Other arborglyphs include short poems, descriptions of life on the range, and drawings of such figures as horses, dogs, self-portraits, and girls. Other carvings were possibly meant to
leave particular messages for later herders and camptenders (Mallea-Olaetxe 2000). The arborglyphs are unique to the American West and offer glimpses of the life of the Basque shepherders and camptenders. As sheepmen saw the names and stories of earlier herders etched into the trunks, it connected them to “the great family of Basques on the range” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2000, 162).

Figure 4-9. A Basque shepherder carved his name and the year on an aspen tree in the Ruby Mountains. Photo by author, September 5, 2014.
Jose Mallea-Olaetxe spent years studying arborglyphs in Nevada and the surrounding states. In Elko County, he found the most carvings in the Columbia Basin, Copper Basin, the Independence Mountains, and the Ruby Mountains (see Figure 4-5). My fieldwork revealed that carvings still exist in these regions. The carvings show where historically the sheep and herders were located. Mallea-Olaetxe (2000) was able to trace
the route various herders took by following their dated carvings. One herder, Castillo, sometimes carved several trees in one day, making it possible to retrace his daily meanderings.

While many arborglyphs are simple inscriptions, some are more detailed and give glimpses of what life was like for the Basque herders. Topics related to the sheep industry, such as foremen, camptenders, herding practices, and general laments offer insights into what Basque herders and camptenders experienced while tending sheep in a foreign country and living in isolation. In Richard Lane’s documentation of carvings in Elko County during the 1960s and early 1970s (1971), he did not find any carvings of sheep. He did, however, find sheep related inscriptions. Some carvings cautioned successors of appropriate herding practices for a given area. Another wrote “no good camp” about a particular area (Aylesworoth 1994). Many Elko residents, Basques and not, comment on the competitive nature of the Basques. As Elko County rancher Ken Jones said, “The Basque herders took pride in what they were doing” (personal communication, August 27, 2014). He remembers them arguing over who had the better lambs. Their competition of producing fine lambs can be found on tree carvings as well. Lane found carvings where herders boasted of the excellent conditions of their lambs (Lane 1971). Some herders carved their thoughts on herding sheep. “This is a sad and bitter life,” wrote one herder (Aylesworth 1994).

Much of the herder’s time was spent watching the sheep, even when they were bedded down. He was their protector. Mallea-Olaexte (2000) described a carving found near the peak of Copper Mountain that encapsulates the sheepherder’s life. As J.Z., the
Basque herder, overlooked Copper Basin and the surrounding mountains in 1915, he carved, “Before I used to chase girls, now I chase sheep, always dreaming” (2000, 52). The life of a shepherder offered much time for dreaming. Another former herder commented that the isolated mountains, “with all the loneliness, is where the shepherders carved their hearts out” (Mallea-Olaexte 2000, 38).

Once radios were available for shepherders, their experiences with the Nevada landscape changed. Loneliness was still a part of the experience, but with the arrival of the transistor radio in the 1960s, herders were no longer as isolated from current world events. The carvings also reveal some of the Basque herders’ views of the United States. Carvings referencing allegiance to the United States include “Long live the United States of America.” In reference to J.F. Kennedy, one herder carved, “Do not ask what the country can do for you” (Mallea-Olaexte 2000, 56). Many Basque sheepmen moved back to the Basque provinces, but some found a home in the American West. Some of the carvings show that not only did the Basque herders identify as Basque, but they were also supportive of America.

Many former herders and sheepmen who carved their names on aspens recall when, where, and what they marked on the trees. On one occasion, Jess Lopategui brought his children and grandchildren to the Columbia Basin where he used to herd sheep and work as a camp tender (personal communication, July 7, 2014). His family searched for one of the carvings Jess had told them about in which he etched “John F. Kennedy 1960” into the trunk of an aspen. Mikel, his son, recalled searching for hours with his wife and their kids (personal communication, July 2014). After they gave up
their search, Jess took them to one tree they had neglected to see and pointed it out to them right away. Mikel and his wife, Anamarie, reminisced about the day with smiles. “It was a special day,” they both told me. Throughout the day they had taken photos to capture the memories. With the photos, they made albums and gifted them to their family. DeLoyd Sattherthwaite is not Basque, but he worked with many Basque herders. He learned of the tree carving tradition and carved a tree with his name and date. Now retired, DeLoyd has a photo of the tree in a frame in his house. He still knows the exact location of the actual tree (personal communication, March 12, 2014).

Arborglyphs carved by working sheepmen are found where they worked. The carvings allow visitors to the groves to be in the actual place where sheepmen carved the trees, and therefore, to get a sense of the sheepmen’s experiences of the place. When a herder carved, “This is a sad and bitter life” on a tree in the isolated, lonely mountains, one may understand more why the herder felt that way with no roads, towns, or houses in sight. The arborglyphs, however, will not always be there. The aspens and the “mountain archives” will eventually fall and deteriorate, and one aspect of the legacy of the Basque sheepherders will then also vanish (Mallea-Olaetxe 2000, 162).

For reasons such as education, awareness of the past, cultural heritage, and business and tourism, some locals are working to keep alive the legacy of the Basque sheepherders and their carvings. One former herder and camptender, Jess Lopategui, planted an aspen in his front yard in Elko. As a symbolic act, he carved the young tree in Basque with the translated phrase of “one sheepherder forever” (Figure 4-11). Jess’s son, Mikel, as a teacher in Elko, incorporated the aspen carvings into an art project for his
students. First, however, he talked about the history of the arborglyphs and the role the Basque sheepherders played in the area. The students then took that information and drew aspens and carved different names, sayings, and figures on the trunks of the trees (Figure 4-12). One student’s drawing was chosen to be put on a poster for an event held during the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering.
Figure 4-11. Jess Lopategui, a former herder and camp tender, carved "one sheepherder forever" into an aspen tree in his yard. Photo by author, July 14, 2014.
Figure 4-12. Jess's son, a local teacher, incorporated the arborglyphs into his lesson plans, and had his students create their own artwork based on them (Mikel Lopategui).

The Northeastern Nevada Museum has periodically incorporated local arborglyphs into exhibits as a form of public education and preserving the past. During the 2014 National Basque Festival, the museum had an extensive display of local and
regional aspen carvings. An upstairs gallery contained photos of carvings all along the walls. Next to each photo was information about the shepherder who carved it. The museum also has a permanent exhibit on the history of the Basques in Elko County. The sheep industry initially lured the majority of Basques to northeastern Nevada, and the exhibit highlights their role in it with historic photos of Basque herders, arborglyphs, shearing events, and fresh sheepherder's bread at sheep camp.

Owners of the Red Lion Hotel in Elko saw a business and economic opportunity in the aspen carvings when they began to remodel their dining room in 2010. Food and Beverage Director, Jack March, said they wanted to incorporate the local heritage into the new restaurant (Elko Daily Free Press 2014, 20 September). With Elko’s heritage in mind, they renamed the restaurant Aspens and decorated it with replicas of the Basque arborglyphs. The photos used to make the replicas were taken by local resident, Alec Goicoechea, whose grandfather was a shepherder. Alec’s photos were taken at Stag Mountain and Gold Creek, both located north of Elko. Artificial fall foliage was used to decorate the trees in order to give customers a feeling of being in Lamoille Canyon, a popular recreation area in the Ruby Mountains near Elko. While the food itself may not represent the Basque heritage, the restaurant’s landscape does.

Arborglyphs have helped shape Elko County in distinct ways. They assist in creating a place identity connected to the Basque shepherders who lived and worked in the local mountains. The original carvings are part of the vernacular sheping landscape and are associated primarily with Basque sheepmen. Businessmen and women, teachers, museum curators, and researchers have each used the arborglyphs and the cultural history
attached to them for different purposes. In doing so, they assist in making the community and tourists aware of the Basque shepherding heritage in northeastern Nevada.

**Urban Signatures**

The legacy of Basques in the sheep industry has also shaped the urban landscape (Figure 4-13). The character of Elko has distinct elements as a result of Basque men and women. Their involvement in the sheep industry has left landscape signatures that include boardinghouses, murals, a statue dedicated to the Basque shepherder, and a Basque clubhouse. Nancy Zubiri (2006, 316), who has traveled to Basque communities across the West, believes “Elko’s old downtown is probably the closest thing you’ll find to a “Basque town” in the West today.” Basque and American West scholar, Iker Saitua, echoes Zubiri’s sentiments, writing, “Elko is one of those western towns in which the Basque legacy remains intact” (Elko Daily Free Press 2013, 9 April). Elko’s Basque population has left an enduring mark on the region’s place identity, in part by adding elements to the local landscape.
Figure 4-13. Elko’s urban Basque landscape signatures. Map by author.
Boardinghouses: Social institutions and businesses in a place can reveal a community’s ethnic diversity (Robertson 2006). Western towns with historically large Basque populations left distinct imprints on the landscape of their communities. Indicators of a Basque presence include their traditional handball court, a Basque social hall, Basque names inscribed on cemetery headstones, and the most important as it directly relates to a sheep ranching heritage, the Basque ostatu, a combination restaurant and boardinghouse. Basques built and ran boardinghouses and restaurants in most communities where a large number of Basques were present (Echeverria 1999). The boardinghouse is one of the greatest legacies on the landscape from the Basques and their sheep ranching heritage in the community of Elko.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century when sheep ranching was a primary industry in northeastern Nevada and the Basques were the primary herders and camptenders, several Basque boardinghouses were built. Basque hotels appeared in western communities near the railroads shortly after Basque sheepmen arrived and became established in considerable numbers (Douglass and Bilbao 1975; Echeverria 1999). The hotels were built to provide Basque shepherders a “home away from home.” When lambs were sold in the fall, sheep bands became smaller, and fewer workers were needed. During the winter months until lambing season began again, many Basque herders and camptenders were out of work and needed a place to stay. The ostatus provided "a roof, a bed, and a bath when he was off the range” as well as “entertainment and social contacts in the form of music, card games, and dances” (Echeverria 1999, 7-8). Not only did the boardinghouses provide an environment for Basques to maintain their
ethnicity, but they also helped Basques transition and adapt in the American West. Hotelkeepers assisted herders with finances, communication, and kept them updated on Old and New World events (Douglass and Bilbao 1975).

In some western communities, sheepmen went to local bars to find herders. While this did happen in Elko, the Basque boardinghouses were known as the “headquarters and information bureau for sheepmen and shepherders” (Elko Daily Free Press 1911, 17 November). Pete Paris remembers stories of going to the Basque Star Hotel to find Basque herders. He recalled, “If you had a Basque shepherd who wasn’t good, you could find another five of them at the Star willing to work. The old ranchers used to say that if you needed a good shepherd there would be five at the Star Hotel willing to work” (Reig 2010).

In addition to the boardinghouses attracting sheepmen, the boardinghouses attracted young Basque women to the American West, too. They immigrated to work as serving girls in the hotels. Upon arriving, however, they often quickly met a single Basque man and were married, which is why the hotels have been referred to as “marriage mills” (Echeverria 2000, 133). Today’s Basque-Americans continue to share stories of women “not staying single for long” as they quickly married local Basque men. Once the women were married, they generally left the hotel business. The rapid turnover led more women to travel to the American West, which led to an increase in the Basque population.

The Basque boardinghouses in Elko peaked in number in the early twentieth century. There were two waves of boardinghouse expansion. Between 1907 and 1910,
three boardinghouses opened including the Telescope Hotel (1907), the Overland Hotel (1908), and the Star Hotel (1910). The 1920s saw six more boardinghouses open in Elko (Echeverria 1999). The rise and success of the hotels parallels the expansion of Basque involvement and dominance in the Nevada sheep industry (Echeverria 2000). The hotels served both newly arrived, as well as seasoned, Basque sheepmen and eventually their families. Elko was a “Basque town” as is evident by the number of boardinghouses that operated through the years. Basque boardinghouses included the Star, the Telescope Hotel, Sabala’s Overland Hotel, Arrascada’s, the Amistad, Garretch's Railroad Depot Hotel, Uriarte’s, the Nevada Hotel, the West Hotel, and the Errecart’s Clifton Hotel (Echeverria 2000). The hotels mentioned most frequently in interviews, archived oral transcripts, and newspapers are the Star Hotel, Overland Hotel, Telescope Hotel, Clifton Hotel, and Nevada Hotel (Figure 4-14) (Elko Daily Free Press 1991, 2 July). Elko was home to Basques from various Provinces, and according to Beltran Paris, Basque sheepmen tended to select boardinghouses that were operated by families from their own Province. For example, speaking of boardinghouses in the 1920s, Paris said, “The owners of the Star and Overland were Vizcainos, and all the Vizcaino guys stayed there. Martin Inda owned the Telescope, and he was a Navarro from Valcarlos. So that was my place. I always stayed there when I was in Elko” (Paris and Douglass 1979, 64).

The physical layouts of Basque boardinghouses across the American West were fairly consistent (Echeverria 2000). Most of them were two or three-story buildings with a bar, lobby, dining room, and kitchen on the first floor. Rooms for the hotelkeeper and his family were also usually on the first floor. The upper floors consisted of dormitory-
style rooms to be rented out and for hotel employees. In Elko, the larger boardinghouses could serve more than twenty renters. The Overland had 24 rooms for rent, while the Star Hotel had 31 rooms (Echeverria 2000).

The boardinghouses closed at different periods depending on demand and ownership. The larger, well-known boardinghouses, such as the Telescope and the Nevada, closed their doors to boarders in the 1960s and 1970s, as there were fewer herders and Basques left in the sheep industry. The Nevada Dinner House kept serving diners, however, until the late 1980s (Echeverria 1999). As boardinghouses closed and
Basque sheepmen became fewer in number, Basques were left with fewer choices. Eventually, the Star Hotel became the only place that functioned as both a boardinghouse and a restaurant.

The Star Hotel remains in business as a Basque restaurant (Figure 4-15). Since its opening in 1910, Basques have continuously owned and operated it. A visit to the Star Hotel reveals its role in the sheep industry among immigrant Basques. Built in 1910 to serve the region’s growing Basque population, today the menu informs diners of the history of the *ostatu* and its role in the western sheep industry.

![Figure 4-15. The Star Hotel, a Basque restaurant. Photo by author, March 13, 2013.](image)

Photos depicting Basques engaged in the common scenes associated with a sheep ranching way of life decorate the interior of the restaurant (Figure 4-16). Photos show the
docking and castrating of lambs, the annual fall gathering of sheep for shipping, and gatherings of men around food at sheep camps. Interior and exterior wall art are significant in that they lend insight to the heritage, preferences, and changes in a community (Arreola 1984). The current owner, Scott Ygoa, said most of the photos that are currently displayed were taken between 1970 and 1990 (personal communication, July 12, 2014). As people bring him photos or he finds other ones, he adds them to the wall. One of the banquet rooms is dedicated to the Basque sheepherder (Figure 4-17). The decision to decorate the interior of the restaurant with everyday sheep scenes shows the importance of the Basques’ sheep ranching heritage in Elko County and the surrounding region. The photos not only make diners aware of the past, but they also promote a collective ethnic and social identity to those connected with sheep ranching in the American West. Mary, the wife of a former Basque herder, said she enjoys looking at the photos at the Star, saying, “I can relate to them” (personal communication, July 12, 2014).
Figure 4-16. Photos depicting Basques engaged in various sheep work decorate the restaurant's walls. Photo by author, March 13, 2013.
While the Star used to cater to primarily Basques, it receives most of its business from non-Basque locals and tourists, as is common among Basque boardinghouses across the West (Douglass and Bilbao 1975; Echeverría 2000). To try to maintain part of the core identity of the hotel, however, the Ygoas opened the restaurant to Basques only for Saturday lunches. Scott Yoga said, “On Saturdays we are closed for lunch for outsiders but it’s open for the Basques. We play [the card game] mus, we have a few drinks. Many times my mother comes to help me out. We do have a good time on Saturdays. We have our drinks relaxed, we tell a few stories, and we take some money from the Basques. Yes, but here the drinks are half price for the Basques” (Reig 2010).
Even as Elko grows and experiences change, stepping inside the Star Hotel gives residents and visitors “an idea of how Elko used to be and - to a degree - still is” (Reno Gazette-Journal 1993, 7 February, 6A). There is continuity from the past in the Star’s interior, such as the physical layout with the bar, lobby room, and dining room. The Basque language is spoken between the owner and other Basque patrons. Although their numbers are declining, former herders can still be found at the bar. The Star Hotel is “a living lesson in preserving the history of Basque immigration in the West” (Elko Daily Free Press 2015, 20 January).

While the Star Hotel is the only Basque boardinghouse and restaurant still in operation, the others are not completely forgotten. There are not any plaques at the present time indicating where past hotels were located, but there are other ways the community remembers. Memories and histories of various boardinghouses are printed in the more recent National Basque Festival programs. In the 2008 festival program, festival-goers read about the Overland Hotel providing rooms to sheepherders, hosting weddings and baptisms, helping people during the 1918 flu epidemic, and providing a place for people to eat, drink, dance, and catch up with friends. Matilde Jauregui’s story is printed in the 2015 program of what it was like owning and working in the Telescope Hotel. Some of the boardinghouses have been torn down, such as the Overland, while others have been repurposed, such as the Telescope Hotel. The lack interpretive signs or walking tours indicates that the Elko community as a whole does not place significant value on the former boardinghouses. Outsiders instead must seek out information on the hotels found most commonly in the local museum and festival programs. Insiders, both
Basques and non, however, still find ways to share the stories through memories shared amongst one another in printed or verbal form.

**Public Art:** Public art is another urban feature that reflects important elements of place identity (Wyckoff 2014b). In 1969, a statue created by Lowell Swendseid, the high school art teacher, was installed in Elko’s City Park along Idaho Street, a main thoroughfare through town (Figure 4-18). Initially, the statue represented a working man and was dedicated to the pioneers of Elko and Elko County (Reno Gazette-Journal 1969, 30 July). In 2000, a local group of residents modified the statue to a Basque sheepherder, which they felt represented the community better (Elko Daily Free Press 2014, 27 August). A plaque was installed near the monument stating that the artwork is “preserving our Basque heritage.” Each year during the National Basque Festival, the statue is decorated with a Basque beret. Although local Basques are no longer engaged in the sheep industry like they were in the past, many in the community continue to recognize the significance of the Basque sheepherders and their role in shaping Elko and the surrounding region.
An Elko mural along the outside wall of Anacabe’s General Mercantile also recognizes the importance of shepherding. Three different historical Nevada scenes are illustrated including cattle ranching, mining, and shepherding. Anita, the store’s current
owner, commissioned the painting of the mural. The cattle ranching scene is based off an early 1900s postcard of her father who was a buckaroo. Anita, however, also wanted to tie in the rest of the heritage of the area (personal communication, March 12, 2014). To paint the three scenes, she asked Nevada artist, Larry Bute, who is known regionally for his cowboy artwork.

The sheepherding scene captures several elements of life on the range for Basque shepherders (Figure 4-19). An aspen showing the initials J.A. is painted on the far side of the mural. Nearby, the iconic shepherder’s wagon is parked. In the distance, a band of sheep grazes on a hillside, and a herder, with his loyal dog by his side, watches over the band. The landscape is an artistic rendition of Nevada’s landscape with some features that are characteristic of the region, such as sagebrush, browned grasses after the summer heat, and mountains along the skyline. Larry Bute said he had the Ruby Mountains in mind when he painted the mural (personal communication, May 11, 2016). The image is not, however, based on a specific photograph, but rather the artist’s interpretation of the region.
Based on interviews, the mural is not seen as a central landscape feature contributing to a community-wide sense of place. Part of the reason could be that the community was not involved. The store owner commissioned the artwork, and as Dolores Hayden (1995, 75) argues, “no public art can succeed in enhancing the social meaning of place without…community support.” Further, the mural is located in a small parking lot near an alley. The buckaroo scene is the largest part of the mural and in the most visible spot on the exterior wall. The shepherding scene, in contrast, is located in the corner, making it more difficult to see, particularly when cars are parked in the lot and shadows are cast over the mural. The mural, however, does inform non-local people who take notice of the artwork of the region’s cultural history. Shepherding, mining, and cattle ranching have all played a role in shaping Elko, both in the past and in the present.

Elko used to have another mural depicting northeastern Nevada lifestyles. In 2006, Larry Bute painted a larger mural on the exterior walls of the Stockmen’s Hotel and Casino. One scene depicted two sheepmen, presumably Basque, as one of the men...
was wearing a Basque beret. They were playing a card game, likely *mus*, a traditional Basque game. While they played mus, sheep grazed in the background. The mural, however, was short-lived. In late 2012, it was painted over during the casino and hotel’s remodeling efforts (Elko Daily Free Press 2012, 26 October).

**The Basque Clubhouse:** Official Basque social clubs began forming in the American West in the twentieth century to preserve and promote the Basque heritage. California clubs were first formed in the 1920s and into the 1940s (Douglass and Bilbao 1975). It was not until 1959 when Elko’s Euzkaldunak Club was formed with the purpose of uniting Basques in the Elko area. In 1978, the club financed the building of their clubhouse and dedicated it on December 31 (Figure 4-20). The building reflects traditional, rural Basque architecture with its clay-tiled roof, wooden planks on the exterior, white exterior walls, and use of stones (Susperregi et al. 2017).
The Basque clubhouse is a community gathering place and “an image of communal life and values” (Tuan 1975, 162). Activities for children and adults are held at the facility. Basque dancing practices and events, language classes, mus tournaments, the Sheepherder’s Ball, lunches, and as of 2015, all of the National Basque Festival events, are held on the club grounds.

The Basque association with sheep ranching is evident at the clubhouse. A bread oven sits outside of the building. The oven was taken from a former summer sheep camp and moved to the clubhouse to avoid its destruction by a mining company (personal communication, July 7, 2014). Inside the clubhouse, the walls are hung with items that reveal the Basques’ history in the American West. A poster from a past museum exhibit titled Amerikauak! Basques in the High Desert features an illustration of a Basque sheep
camp. An article from the first National Basque Festival in Elko is enlarged and framed. One wall contains plaques with lifetime club members and plaques memorializing certain individuals. One memorial plaque reads, “Elko County Sheepherder: Louis Lespade: 1895-1977.” The clubhouse bar’s decorations include a large lamb figurine and a photo of an arborglyph carving. Through sponsored events and wall decorations, members are reminded of their Basque heritage and non-Basques are also informed.

Sheep as a Cultural Symbol

For many Basques, sheep came to symbolize opportunities for freedom and success in the American West. The sheep industry provided an outlet for thousands of Basques. Consequently, the sheep itself has become a cultural symbol of Basque ethnicity in the American West and even the Basque culture in Spain.

In Elko, it is not uncommon to see the fluffy sheep symbol as a car decal, on Basque t-shirts, and Basque promotional materials, such as festival programs and calendars (Figure 4-21). The sheep symbol is not limited to Basques in the American West. Several Elko Basques who have visited the Basque provinces in Spain, said the sheep symbol is a sign you are Basque, while the bull is a symbol of Spanish identity (personal communications, July 2014). Basque-Americans in the United States and Basques in the Basque provinces have always stayed connected. Many who migrated to the American West as herders went back to their homeland after their contracts expired. Basque-Americans still visit family in the Basque provinces. Whether living in the West or in one of the Basque provinces, the sheep industry is part of the Basque story, and the sheep has come to symbolize Basques on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.
The Basque sheeping mural, the statue, and the fluffy sheep symbolize the importance of sheep ranching to the Basque heritage in the American West. They are relatively recent additions to the landscape that were created with the express purpose of celebrating a Basque sheepherding heritage. The majority of Elko County’s sheeping landscapes, however, were created as part of the working landscape. They became vernacular, everyday landscape features. Aspen trees were carved while herders and camptenders were on the job. Camptenders used ovens to bake bread for the herders. Boardinghouses were built to initially serve the Basque sheepmen. Attached to all of the working sheep landscape features are memories. The open range of Nevada also contains thousands of invisible landscapes. Some of the stories are shared, while others remain known only to an individual.
The Basque sense of community is rooted in the various work activities including lambing, herding, camptending, docking, and shipping. “Shearing, lambing, and branding bring memories of long hours of work, starting before daylight and often not ending before the middle of the night” (Sorensen and Sorensen, n.d., 4-5). During interviews with past and current sheepmen, from the ranchers, herders, and camptenders, they all shared memories of the hard work involved in raising sheep. Even if they have been away from the industry for decades, their memories of the arduous work remain.

The Basques were tied to the sheep industry for much of the twentieth century. Up until the early 1970s, there were still Basque immigrants migrating to Elko County to work as sheepherders. Multiple Basque boardinghouses were still serving Basque sheepmen through the 1960s. With so many Basques involved in the industry, whether it was as herders, camptenders, or boardinghouse workers, the place-based community that developed in Elko County revolved around sheep-related activities. Even those who had departed from the sheep industry still knew family and friends involved, and therefore, many of them still took part in certain sheeping traditions. Community work and activities create shared experiences and contribute to a more “vigorous” sense of place (Starrs 1998; Mansfield 2012). Sheeping activities were a way for the Basque community to work together and have shared experiences, make memories together, carry on the traditions earlier Basques participated in, and ultimately, help shape the place identity of Elko County.
Lambing

Lambing, for example, was both an important economic as well as community-defining activity. In Elko County, sheep ranchers lamb on the open range. They do not use lambing sheds or buildings, but instead trail the sheep to “lambing grounds.” Lambing grounds consist of a several mile tract of land along the trailing route where ewes give birth to, or “drop,” their lambs. Quality lambing grounds have certain features in common. They offer protection in the form of sage brush, or “sage shelter,” and they have plenty of water and green grass available (Boyd 1998). Lambing season is one of the busiest seasons for Nevada sheepmen. One Basque herder said, “Springtime is bad for us. Lots of work because of lambing” (Hadley 1980a). Vulnerable newborn lambs do not have sheds to protect them from the weather or predators, such as coyotes. Therefore, herders must provide extra protection for them, including throughout the night.

When Pete Paris was raising thousands of sheep, he used to live out on the range away from his family during lambing season. Rama, Pete’s wife, said she and the girls would visit him at camp occasionally and bring supplies and provisions as needed (personal communication, July 2014). With thousands of ewes lambing, however, it was a busy few weeks. For the month of April, he and his herders worked in all types of weather, from sunny and pleasant days to cold, windy, and snowy days. After lambing season was over, Andrea, one of his daughters, remembered the usual clean-shaven Pete coming back home with a full beard (Paris 2005).

Martin Goicoechea is a bertsolari who sings improvised poetry in the Basque language. He immigrated to the West when he was 17 years old and worked on a sheep
ranch in Wyoming. When he performs, he is sometimes asked to sing about the sheep ranching lifestyle. Concerning lambing on a cold spring day, Martin sang, “It’s end of May, and starting June. It’s sad to see this weather, so much wind, rain, and mud. This is awful kind of weather for the herds. It’s unbelievable how many young lambs lose their lives with this weather” (Western Folklife Center 2007). In a different setting, Martin sang again about lambing season and the brutality of the work. “Lambs by the hundreds were born / everyday among the sagebrush. / Spring was a battle, / we could not avoid work, / we strove to save the lambs, / we even forgot to eat” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 347).

Although not in prose, Ramon Zugazaga also has memories of a cold and difficult lambing season. Ramon immigrated to Elko County during lambing season. He remembers his boss picking him up and bringing him to the sheep camp cabin. “I spent my first night in America right here [at the cabin]. At that time the lambs were being born. In America we call the paricion, when the lambs are born. That night was cold, it snowed” (Reig 2010).

Lambing was also a time that brought herders together. All the sheep lambed in the same area, so the herders for each band of sheep were closer together, unlike at the winter or summer sheep camps. While there was little time to socialize because of the work load, herders did not have to go a week without seeing or talking to another person.

Lambing always produces some orphan lambs, often called bum lambs or in Nevada, leppy lambs, or leppis/leppys/leppees for short. Often times, the wives of sheep ranchers care for the leppis. Connie Satterthwaite was known as “Mother Connie” during lambing season when she would become a mother to more than 40 orphaned lambs (Elko
Daily Free Press 1983, 8 July). Jo Bartorelli reminisced about bottle feeding the orphaned lambs, saying, “We always had baby lambs that were tame you know. Did a lot of crying too when they took them away from us” (NNM 1998, 33). Mary Urriola Smith remembered herders dropping off the orphan lambs when they came through Jack Creek on the way to the mountains. She bottle-fed them and developed a bond with each of them. She wrote that she “always had a good cry in the fall when the bands of sheep came our way again” and picked up her “babies” to rejoin the herd (1990, 39).

As in other western sheep ranching communities, lambing season affected all members of the family. Men were often working around the clock for several weeks. Wives became camp-tenders and brought food and supplies to the sheep camps. Female family members, both wives and daughters, were often involved in raising leppy lambs as well. After lambing, it was summer, and as one herder said, “summertime good” as life slowed down a bit for many (Hadley 1980).

**Docking**

Docking the lambs was another shared activity among the Basques. At the end of May, after all the ewes have lambed out, the lambs are docked and all the sheep are marked with paint. Unlike cattle that are branded with a hot iron, sheep are marked with paint because they will be sheared again. During docking, ranchers also cut the tails of all the lambs, and they castrate the male lambs. The technique of castration, which uses a knife and teeth, is a tradition commonly associated with Basque sheepmen. Kent McAdoo explained the process. He said one person held the lamb and the other took “a knife and split the scrotum” and then proceeded to “pop the testicles out, and with their
teeth they bear down on the testicles, pull them out along with the seminal vesicles” (personal communication, June 29, 2013). Basque ranchers who were in the business for years have castrated “thousands and thousands” of lambs in this way. Many Basques and friends of Basques who attend “docking day” have vivid memories of the process. Although the process looks messy, the ranchers maintain that it is the safest, cleanest, and least painful method of castration for the lambs in a range operation.

Jo Bartorelli compared cattle branding to docking lambs. She said that branding was a big work event, but not a party. “The sheep,” she said, “when they were docking the lambs and that was the big thing” (NNM 1998, 32). Pete Paris said between the workers, families, and friends, their docking day could consist of 15 or more people. Visitors, both those involved with sheep and those with little or no background, attend the activity and learn about the tradition. It is a day for not only work, but a social gathering connecting people to a western Basque tradition. DeLoyd Sattherwaite recalled another part of the Basque docking tradition. At the end of the day, the buckets of testicles and tails were fried, and they all ate them together (personal communication, March 12, 2014).

**Herding and Camptending**

Herders in northeastern Nevada all have stories of herding in the high country during the summer and in the vast sagebrush deserts of the lower country during the winter. For the Basques who left their families and familiar environments of home, it could be particularly difficult to herd sheep all by oneself in a foreign country. When they share their early memories, they are not nostalgic or overly despairing. Rather, they tend
to be pragmatic. There is an acknowledgement of the struggles, but many of them end their stories with rational statements on their views of the realities of life. It is perhaps this down-to-earth mentality that helped them endure the job and move on to different careers after their contracts expired. Many of them saw herding in the American West as a temporary way of life that could provide them with money to go back to the Basque provinces and start a business or to eventually become an American citizen and acquire more appealing jobs.

Joe Sarasua worked with sheep between 1948 and 1953. He recalled coming to Elko and working with sheep in the western environment. “You get used to it, but it’s rough…It doesn’t matter how hot it is, if it starts raining, gets cold, you have to be there. You have to take everything on your back. Sometimes you can stay in a cabin but there are times when you have to control the speed of the herd. You have to walk all day, mile after mile. Sometimes at night, with a moon, the sheep start moving, and you have to go with them.” Sarasua acknowledged the difficulty of herding sheep, but he ended his memory of his time as a herder with a sentiment echoed by other Basques who herded sheep. “It was lonely and herding was not easy…but nothing is easy in this world” (Hadley 1980, 40).

Many Basque herders reminisce of the loneliness of the job. One herder said, “In a year we would walk thousands of miles. But that wasn’t the hard part. The hard part was the loneliness. You would almost die from the loneliness, just to hear a human voice” (Laxalt 1991, 24). Another former Basque sheepmen, Bartolo, worked with the sheep for five years in the 1970s. He tended sheep in the Ruby Mountains and in northern
Elko County in the Jarbidge vicinity. Both areas are known for their beauty and ruggedness. Bartolo remembers spending summers in the mountains, and told me, “You had to make up your mind that you wouldn’t be lonely in the summer and look around and decide instead to enjoy the scenery” (personal communication, March 10, 2014).

Former herders often talk of how happy they were when the camptender or another human visited camp. Linda Dufurrena remembers the Basque herders running out to see them when they visited sheep camp (Loeffler 2002). DeLoyd Satterwaite managed the sheep operations at the Spanish Ranch, and during an interview, he recalled Basque herders walking miles to another summer sheep camp just to visit (personal communication, March 12, 2014).

Herding and camp tending was typically lonely work, as many herders have attested. Sometimes, however, there was not time to feel lonely. Beltran Paris reminisced about camp tending in 1921. He said, “I never had a chance to feel lonely. I was busy all the time. I had to go around looking for feed and move the camp…Sometimes I had to make corrals out of cedar posts when it was time to shear or if our sheep got mixed up with another bunch and we had to separate them. So I had plenty of work” (Paris and Douglass 1979, 81-82). Frank Lespade did not remember loneliness either. He said, “There was work to do, and you did it” (Aylesworth 1994, 205).

Many Basque herders recall that summer herding left them with some down time during the day when the sheep were bedded down. During their down time, some recalled carving trees or wood into figurines. Others remember fishing nearby streams. Frank Arregui was a Basque herder for Ken and Lorna Jones. During an interview, Ken talked
of Frank coming back for visits after his contract expired to go fishing on Thorpe Creek where he used to herd sheep in the northern Ruby Mountains (personal communication, August 27, 2013). Jess Lopategui shared some of his memories as a camptender with me, including his memories of fishing. Jess continues to visit the summer herding areas of northern Elko County to go fishing near the areas he used to tend sheep camps (personal communication, July 7, 2014). Pete Amestoy herded sheep for 24 years. Although he recalled the loneliness, he also remembered the time he had for fishing (Aylesworth 1994).

Foreign herders and new camptenders did not know the details and layout of Elko County and the surrounding region where they were working. It took time to learn the country and the intimate details of the land. Therefore, when the sheep boss, or ranch owner, needed to communicate where to go next to find fresh feed and water, he drew a map. A sheepherder described the scenario to Robert Laxalt, and he wrote the description in the book, *Nevada* (1991, 24). The herder said, “The boss would take a stick, and looking at that miserable desert stretching out there forever, he would scratch a map on the ground. To show where the water was, where the good feed was, and where the poisoned was. Then you just moved out.” Today, ranchers continue to draw maps in the dirt with a stick to show herders, now mostly Peruvian, where to take the sheep next (Figure 4-22).
Some Basque sheepmen continued to herd or tend sheep camps even after they married and had a family. Sometimes the family accompanied them, but most of the time, the wife and children stayed at their own home. Mary Urriola Smith remembers feeling
deprived when her father was away tending camps for several herders on the range. “When he came home,” she wrote, “it was a celebration. He would tell us about his travels and the people he saw” (1990, 31). Robert Laxalt’s father also continued working with sheep in the mountains after he had a family. In *A Sweet Promised Land* (1957, 1), Laxalt opened the book with, “My father was a sheepherder, and his home was the hills.” Laxalt wrote that his father’s presence in their Carson City home was limited to “rare and fleeting visits” (2). Although the wives and children of Basque herders and camptenders did generally not spend all their time on the range, they, too, have memories associated with the activities of herding and camptending.

**Shipping**

The fall shipping of summer fattened lambs is reason for ranchers and herders to celebrate (Figure 4-23). In September, Elko area ranchers sell their lambs and receive a paycheck, and the herders see the result of all of their patience in herding the sheep toward quality feed with the increased weight. The conscientious herders felt their reputation was on the line when the lambs were counted and weighed at shipping time (Aylesworth 1994). The Basques are considered a competitive group and find ways to compete, from wood chopping and weight lifting events at festivals to the weighing of the lambs they have been in charge of for the past several months. Former herders talk about the pride of managing a band of sheep to get the highest weight.
Fall shipping is one annual round of activity that for some sheep companies morphed into a community celebration. The “community” was sometimes primarily workers, while other times the “community” also included friends and family. Kent and Cathy McAdoo remember large gatherings at fall shipping during the 1970s. They recalled families of the sheepmen as well as townsfolk coming out for the day to partake in the work and festivities (personal communication, August 28, 2014). Marian Sorensen wrote about her shipping memories with the herders. “There was a picnic feeling as the sheepherders, truck drivers, extra men and lots of children gathered to bless and eat the food” (n.d., 23). She remembered stories being shared while everybody ate, such as tales of ewes jumping over the kids or somebody falling in the manure. For Pete and Rama
Paris, fall shipping came to be known as the Company Picnic (personal communication, July 8, 2014). Pete told me it was not always that way. It used to be mostly ranch hands at the shipping. As the industry declined, however, fall shipping started to become not only a day of work, but also a day of gathering and fun. It became a reason to get friends and family together to share stories and eat good food. During conversations with Anamarie and Mikel Lopategui, they talked of the Company Picnic with the Paris family and the memories and fun surrounding the event (personal communication, July 2014). There are lots of smiles, laughs, stories, and good food and drinks with the Ruby Mountains as a backdrop. Working together, sharing meals, and storytelling are “times of great social gatherings where the bonds of kinship and community are re-centered” and traditions and connections to the Basque heritage endure (Mansfield 2012, 70).

**Shearing**

Shearing the sheep was another community-defining activity that included both Basque and non-Basque participants. Shearing in Elko County was done by traveling shearing crews who were “following the money [and] following the seasons” (Western Folklife Center 2007, 11). The crews and ranchers would make arrangements to meet at a certain place along the trailing route sometime between March and May, depending on each outfit’s route and their lambing schedules. Sometimes the shearing was done at corrals, and other times, temporary corrals were put in place. When DeLoyd Satterthwaite managed the sheep at Ellison Ranches, he had ranch hands build temporary corrals in a gravel pit about a mile off of Interstate 80 near Beowawe in northern Eureka County. It took them two days to build the corrals, pens, and chutes that were necessary
to run the 10,000 sheep through (Elko Daily Free Press 1995, 16 May). Not all 10,000 sheep were corralled at the same time. DeLoyd would contact each herder to tell them what day to arrive. After the band was sheared, the herder kept moving the ewes toward the lambing grounds. Other Elko sheep ranchers operated in similar ways, such as employing traveling crews and shearing their sheep during the transition between winter range and the lambing range (Elko Daily Free Press 1966, 29 April; 1984, 26 April).

As in other areas of the American West, shearers used to use hand clippers. Lenore Holbert (1987) recalled the shearers going from town to town in the area using the hand shearers. Later, they used electric shearers. She remembers traveling crews coming from California and setting up their tents. The crews, mostly Mexican, were made up of itinerant workers. DeLoyd Satterthwaite had experience with Mexican shearers, but he usually had New Zealand shearers on the crews he employed. Although retired now from the sheep business, he still talks enthusiastically about sheep and the seasonal round of activities. Concerning shearing, he said, “To watch people shear sheep is like watching a bonfire. You can watch these guys shear sheep, and they do the same thing every two and a half minutes, but you just sit there all day, and you can watch them,” (Western Folklife Center 2007, 11).

Ranchers would sometimes contract with the same person. While a sheep rancher may work with the same contractor year after year, members of the shearing crew changed over time. They may still be a New Zealand- or Mexican- or Australian-based crew, but with new people, it could be difficult to create traditions. The shearing crew, however, likely had been working together as they followed the seasons. Many times
they started further south and worked their way north as the weather warmed. One shearing crew felt a sense of comaradarie, and after a long day of shearing, they proceeded to “fill a lonely bar a dozen miles up the interstate where they down[ed] draft beer as fast as the bartender can draw it” (Western Folklife Center 2007, 11).

The shearing crews created their own community. They were not a considerable part of the Basque sheeping community. Some areas of the West, such as Big Timber, used local and regional shearing crews, which ultimately enhanced the sense of identity among the entire Sweet Grass sheeping community. Further, shearing for many of the large Elko County based ranchers happened out on the range, away from town and other sheepmen. It was a busy several days for the Basque herders and sheepmen, and when shearing was finished, there was not time to relax. The herders had to keep the ewes moving in order for them to reach the lambing grounds on time. Therefore, the larger Elko community as a whole was not directly involved. It was generally not a community event like it was, and is, in Big Timber.

Despite the lack of involvement from the larger community, newspapers chose to feature shearing in their stories. Shearing provided an opportunity for a variety of action-packed photographs to accompany the news story. Not only did the news stories show photos of the shearsers, but they also featured photos that put the shearing location in context (Elko Daily Free Press 1966, 29 April; 1984, 26 April; 1995, 16 May). Views of shorn and unshorn sheep on the Nevada range, herders moving sheep around, and sheep going through the corrals with the wide-open range in the background place the shearing in context and better represent the place. Buchanan (2009) suggests that placing the local
in newspaper photographs contributes more to a sense of place among the readers. By featuring shearing stories that contained local photos and a brief history of sheep ranching in the area, the newspaper could help create a connection for the community to the sheep industry. Elko County supported over 200,000 sheep at one time, and by way of shearing season, the newspaper helped highlight one aspect of Elko County that was significant to the place.

Sheep Ranching as Part of the Community

Sheep ranching remains a part of Elko’s place identity even though fewer residents, including Basques, remain involved in the business today. It has been embedded in Elko’s narrative. Writing of Elko in the 1970s, Robert Laxalt (1991, 14) wrote, “The standup bars and saloons are lined at day’s end with…sheepherders with short-brimmed Stetsons and faces burned with sun and wind and cold. The mark of lonely existence is stamped on all their faces.” Long time residents still have memories of the community from that time period. Anita Anacabe-Franzoia’s father, Joe Anacabe, arrived in Nevada in 1901. In 1936, he opened Elko General Merchandise in its present-day location (Figure 4-24). The store has been called a “reference point and store for the Basques of Elko” (EuskalKultura 2014). As Anita said, her father took care of the herders and “hooked them up with supplies” (personal communication, March 12, 2014). He knew what they needed in Nevada’s deserts and mountains, and the Basque immigrants trusted him. “Everyone went to Anacabe’s. Everyone,” said one former herder (Reig 2010). Not only did he sell them needed supplies, he welcomed Basque sheepmen to Elko by giving all the new herders a pocket knife when they arrived. Ramon Zugazaga
reminisced about coming to Elko as a herder. He said, Joe Anacabe “knew what we needed to take to the sheep land. The bedroll, the clothes. He put it all together in a package, and it’s been forty-five years in America and I still hold in my pocket the knife that Joe Anacabe gave me. It’s been with me for forty-five years” (Reig 2010). Anita said former Basque herders frequently mentioned her father in stories they have shared with her (personal communication, March 12, 2014). She continues to own and operate the store and eagerly shares stories of the Basques in Elko.
Figure 4-24. Basque herders used to get their supplies from Anacabe’s General Store. Photo by author, July 14, 2014.

Marilee is not Basque, but she is a fourth generation Elko resident. During the National Basque Festival, she shared stories with me of growing up with the Basques and
reminisced of the time when Elko was a small ranching town (personal communication, July 6, 2013). She and others remember when former and current Basque herders and camptenders were a familiar sight at the Star Hotel. One former herder remembered when “it was hard to see an American or a Mexican around here [in the bars and hotels]. All Basque. All euskaldunak. All shepherds” (Reig 2010).

Kent McAdoo lived in a sheep camp for a year between 1973 and 1974. In the mid to late 1990s, he began giving talks about the Basque herders in northeastern Nevada. He tells stories of the seasonal rounds of activities, such as lambing on the open range and tying ewes to sagebrush until they accept a lamb and trailing sheep hundreds of miles from summer range to the winter range. He also goes into detail about how the Basques adapted to northeastern Nevada and shaped the region through place names, foodways, and landscape features. In an interview with McAdoo, he said often times, attendees at his presentations have their own stories to share with him (personal communication, August 28, 2014). His presentations reach a wide audience, from locals and tourists to kids in grade schools. The sharing of Kent’s experiences and stories as well as stories from the audience help maintain a connection to the past and help the Basque sheepherder legacy endure.

The vernacular language of Elko has also been shaped by the Basques of the region. “Sheep talk” is not uncommon amongst and between Basques. In Amerikanuak: Basques in a New World (Douglass and Bilbao 1975, 352), the authors wrote,

While few Basque-Americans remain in sheep…there is a sense in which even the urban Basque recognizes the group’s identification with the sheep industry. This is reflected in his knowledge of the sheep business, his attendance at rural festivals, his visits to the ranches owned by relatives and
childhood friends, and his joking patterns. An urban Basque may humorously excuse his behavior with the statement, ‘What do you expect from a sheepherder?’ Similarly, he may couch self-praise in the statement, ‘Pretty good for a sheepherder.’ Such statements may be made by persons two generations removed from the sheep business.

Several second and third generation Basques in Elko said sheepherder jokes are common between Basques and non-Basques. Pete Paris told me when the statement was posed, “You know you are a Basque if…,” his daughter and her friend filled in the blank with, “a cowman and a sheepman are having an argument, you always take the side of the sheepherder even if they’re wrong” (personal communication, September 24, 2013).

Community Festivals and Celebrations

Geographers have shown a convincing connection between heritage and place identity (Baker 2003). One avenue for this exploration has been through festivals celebrating the local heritage of a place and its people (Hoelscher and Ostergren 1993; De Bres and Davis 2001; Schnell 2003; Alexander 2009). Community celebrations contribute to a group identity by reinforcing cultural memories of the past (Arreola 2002). While some western communities have festivals that focus exclusively on their sheep ranching traditions, the Basque community in Elko celebrates their Basque heritage. While doing so, they incorporate their association with sheep into their overall celebration.

Heritage and ethnic tourism became more popular during the 1960s (Schnell 2003). Many groups turned to their ethnic heritage as a way to connect to the past. Communities also saw the economic potential of such celebrations as the festivals would bring in tourists. There was a period prior to the surge in ethnic festivals where some
groups were heavily discriminated against, making public celebrations rare. The Basques in the American West were one group that experienced discrimination during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As they acculturated and became accepted in American society, they began to celebrate their heritage with festivals. In 1959, the first large, public Basque festival was held in Sparks, Nevada. Soon after, Basque clubs were started in other western communities with large Basque populations. Elko’s club began in 1960, and according to Nicolas Fagoaga, one of the founders, a one day festival was held for a few years. It was a smaller gathering compared to the later festivals. In 1964, it changed and grew considerably. They began calling it the National Basque Festival and made the extravaganza a two-day event (Elko Daily Free Press 2002, 28 June).

The picnic, as the festival is often called, developed from the desire of Basque shepherders to gather together with other Basques and socialize with conversations and games (Zubiri 2006). The event, however, was not only for locals. Since the National Basque Festival originated, Basques from across the United States and the Basque Provinces have converged in Elko to celebrate their culture with elements from both the Old Country and their heritage in the American West. Advertisements for the first festival were seen in other western Basque communities as well as throughout Europe (Elko Daily Free Press 1964, 10 August).

Today, the multi-day event consists of a parade, traditional Basque dances, handball tournaments, wood chopping competitions, and the transmission and reinforcement of social memories to all generations of Basques. While some events are primarily Old World traits, such as the handball tournaments, traditional Basque dances,
and the weight lifting and wood chopping competitions, others highlight the heritage of Basques in the American West. One such event is the Sheepherder’s Bread Contest (Figure 4-25). The contest reflects the frequent ritual of the Basque sheepherder and camp tender on the range when he, and on rare occasions she, would mix together flour, water, salt, and a yeast starter in a Dutch oven to create a sheep camp staple – bread. Jess Lopategui has memories from the first National Basque Festival. He was a camp tender at the time and remembers baking eighteen loaves for the festival. He and another camp tender received a respite from the sheep camp and came into town for the celebration (personal communication, July 7, 2014). Since the first Elko festival when more than 40 loaves of bread were entered into the contest by area sheepherders, the contest has been one of the crowd favorites and is always part of the festival (Elko Daily Free Press 1988, 28 June).
Sheep related events have been part of the Elko festival off and on over the years. Much of the decision to include certain events rests on the current board organizing the festival each year. When more of the festival attendees and participants had knowledge and experience as herders, camptenders, and working with livestock, the sheep hooking event was a staple competition and drew a large number of participants and viewers. The event required a contestant to catch an ewe with a long hook and tie its leg to a post. The event used skills that all herders needed on Nevada’s open range. Herders and sheepmen frequently caught ewes and tied them to sagebrush in order for them to accept their lambs during lambing season. According to Alfonso Igoa, a former herder, the sheep-hooking event was one of the most popular events, and each man had his own style (Elko Daily
Free Press 1971, 3 July). With a general population lacking the necessary skills to hook and tie a sheep, the competition was removed in the late 1990s. Sheep themed events, however, did not completely disappear from the National Basque Festival. Events such as a sheep dog exhibition and the running of the sheep still connected the Basques with their sheep ranching heritage in the West, but they were more accessible to the majority of the attendees. Eliminating events that require skills learned out on the Nevada range indicates a shift away from that generation’s experience in the American West.

Other events illustrate the adaptation of Old World traits in a new environment. Wood chopping competitions are part of the traditional Basque culture, but Basque sheepherders and camptenders in the American West also found the practice useful during their camp tending and herding days. While the sheep would be resting during the day, the camptender or herder would chop nearby wood to supply the sheep camp. Doing so not only provided the camp with a sufficient wood supply, but it also prepared the herder or camptender for upcoming competitions at local picnics. Mary Igoa recalled the earlier festivals where many of the participants in the wood chopping contest were current or former herders and camptenders (personal communication, July 12, 2014). Pete Paris, a third generation Basque sheep rancher, reminisced about festivals of the past when different ranching outfits had their herders and camptenders unofficially compete against one another in events. He remembered that many of the sheepmen would come in from the range for the festival, and the Paris herders competed against the Goicoechea herders and other sheepmen (personal communication, July 6, 2014). At the third annual National Basque Festival, “The John Carpenter Ranch won a rotating trophy for most
successful participation in the competition, barely edging out the Jess Goicoechea ranch” (Elko Free Daily Press 1966, 5 July).

The National Basque Festival has changed since the first one was held in 1964. Pete Paris said it was “more herder authentic than today” (personal communication, July 6, 2014). Others who attended the early festivals echo his sentiments. In the first couple of decades of the festival, there were more men and women in attendance who were born in one of the Basque provinces. They migrated to the American West primarily as herders, campers, or hotel workers so they were more directly connected to the sheep industry. Some of the second generation remained connected to the industry as their parents continued raising or working with sheep, although the number declined considerably. As the sheep industry weakened, ranchers increasingly sold their sheep, and fewer people, Basques and non-Basques, were left in the industry. The National Basque Festival reflects the shift from a “herder authentic” celebration to one more connected to the traditional games and dances of the Basque provinces. While jota dances have always been a part of the festival, the “sheepherder stomp” is no longer part of the vernacular language. Jota dances take skill and practice, while the “sheepherder stomp” has been described as drunken jumping with a little bit of dancing that was typical of the Basque sheepherder if he stepped out on the dance floor (personal communication, July 6, 2014).

Although the festival has changed, it has not lost all of the connections to the primary reason Basques migrated to the American West. At the festival, there are still reminders of the association with sheep, such as the Sheepherder’s Bread contest, the occasional event with a sheep theme, sheep floats in the parade, and the occurrence of the
sheep as a cultural symbol displayed on cars, t-shirts, and other memorabilia sold at booths (Figure 4-26). Another important avenue connecting sheep raising and the Basques can be found in the festival programs. The more recent programs feature not only advertisements and schedules, but also stories and photos of the past.

Figure 4-26. A sheep-themed float at the National Basque Festival and Fourth of July parade. Photo by author, July 6, 2013.

A staple in the programs is a one-page history of the Elko Basque Club that states the festival began as “a celebration that brought shepherders and cattle ranchers into town for a day of celebration.” More recently, however, stories and photos of the past have been included in the programs. Based on a content analysis of the programs, featured stories of the Basque experience in Elko did not become a considerable part of the publications until 2008. In 2008, the festival theme was a salute to the Basque Sheepherder, and the program contained a sheepherder history, a copy of a sheepherder’s contract, histories of some of the local boardinghouses, and picture collages of Basque
herders working and living on the Nevada ranges. After 2008, many subsequent programs also included historical reminiscences and histories of local Basque landmarks. The era of the Basque sheepherder had ended, and many who had first-hand experience in the industry were aging or have died. Cassandra Stahlke, the 2016 club secretary, sees the programs as one way to share information between the older generations and future generations (Elko Daily Free Press 2016, 3 March). Club officers organizing the festival and putting the program together now encourage locals to share their family histories. In the 2013 program, a photo shows a group of men “enjoying real sheepherder food at a working sheep camp in northern Elko County in 1968 - beans, lamb stew, Dutch oven bread, and red wine at the Goicoechea Sheep Camp.” In 2016, several locals submitted family histories and stories of their experiences. Jess Lopategui wrote about his experience as a camptender in 1964. He also shared a history of one of the bread ovens that was built in the early 1950s for a sheep camp in the Columbia Basin, north of Elko. Many of the personal stories and family histories mention the role sheepherding had in bringing an individual to Elko County. The sharing of memories through the festival programs reinforces knowledge and awareness of the role the sheep industry had in bringing Basques to the region. These stories and histories are important in keeping younger and future generations aware of the role Basques played in shaping the American West as a result of their involvement in the sheep industry.

The Role of the Local Newspaper

Local journalism also plays a considerable role in fostering a sense of place (Lewis 1979b). The activities performed in a place contribute to a place identity, and
local publications that document a community’s ordinary activities play a role in shaping a place. Local newspapers print stories they deem valuable to the community, and stories that are unique to the place. Local newspapers can also play a role in shaping readers’ perceptions of an event or an activity, such as that of raising sheep. The Elko Daily Free Press is Elko’s primary newspaper. It has used different names, including the Daily Free Press and Elko Free Press and has covered news in the community since 1883. Throughout the years, they have printed stories on sheep-related news, the Basques’ connection to the sheep industry in the American West, and the Basque celebrations in Elko. As sheep numbers have declined and the Basque sector of the population has decreased as a percentage of the total population, there has also been a decrease in local stories covering sheep and Basque news.

One event the newspaper continues to cover extensively is the National Basque Festival. Since Elko’s first public festival kicked off in 1964, the local newspaper has covered it thoroughly. The festival, however, has changed in some ways, so the coverage has also changed. In 1964, and into the 1970s, Elko County was still sheep country. Many first and second generation Basques continued to be involved in the industry. The newspaper’s coverage of the early festivals between 1964 and into the 1980s included details that connected the Basques to the sheep industry in northeastern Nevada. Descriptions include statements such as dozens “of tempting loaves of golden brown Basque sheepherder sourdough bread will be judged by a jury of leading sheep ranchrs [sic], the winning sheepherder-baker to receive a gleaming trophy” (Elko Daily Free Press 1964, 5 August, 3). It was not uncommon for articles covering the history of the
Basques in Elko County to appear close to the festival. The articles spent considerable amounts of space detailing the Basques’ involvement in the local and regional sheep industry, from the large number of Basque herders to the role of the Basque hotels (1968, 29 June; 1986, 1 July; 1991, 2 July). These stories would have resonated with Elko readers, as many of them would have had memories or experiences with the Basque shepherding traditions.

There is little left of the sheep industry in Elko. Therefore, stories of shearing, shipping, trailing, and lambing are not a significant part of the community, and the newspaper rarely prints news stories on such activities. When more locals were involved in the industry, however, the newspaper did cover at least one aspect of the seasonal round of activities. Sheep shearing provides an opportunity for a variety of photos, and the *Elko Daily Free Press* periodically covered the annual activity (1966, 29 April; 1984, 26 April; 1995, 16 May). The stories were multipage spreads showing images of sheep, shearers, and thousands of pounds of wool. Readers learned about the process of shearing in Elko County, such as the grueling work of the job, the importance of timing, and the marketing and selling of the wool. Shearing took international cooperation with New Zealand shearers (1995, 16 May), but it also involved local cooperation with neighbors letting sheep ranchers shear sheep on their land (1984, 26 April). They learned about the region’s “ages-old livestock trails to the lambing grounds and summer ranges north of Elko” (1966, 29 April, 5).

Although shearing stories were not printed every year, the occasional story showed that sheep ranching was a part of the community. The large headlines and
multipage spreads indicate that the newspaper wanted to highlight the event (Buchanan 2009). They saw that shearing was not only a part of the life in northeastern Nevada for some segments of the community, but it was part of what made the region unique. With only two large sheep operations left in Elko County in 2016, sheep shearing events now impact very few members of the community and newspaper articles featuring such activities as shearing are rare.

The *Elko Daily Free Press* continues to feature Basque stories in their “Local” and “Lifestyle” sections. The Basques are no longer involved in the sheep industry as they once were. Therefore, current event stories connecting sheep raising and the local Basques are scarce. However, when stories of the Basque narrative in Nevada are printed, the connection to shepherding is clear. Iker Saitua wrote of the Star Hotel’s role in helping Basque immigrants (2015, 20 January). He also wrote about his experiences of working on a Nevada sheep ranch to try to mimic the experience of foreign Basque herders from the twentieth century (2015, 12 May). A series written by Elko native, Vince Juaristi, highlights the history of the Basques in the United States. He makes reference to the early Basque sheepherders and the men and women who supported them often (2016, 8 February; 5 March; 9 April; 7 May; 11 June). Juaristi argues characteristics such as group cohesion, a strong work ethic, frugal tendencies, and an independent spirit embodied the Basque herders, camptenders, and hotel workers who came to the American West and succeeded. Basques are no longer involved in the sheep industry as they once were, but their spirit and legacy endures.
Clues to the Basque sheeping heritage can also be found in the *Elko Daily Free Press* obituaries. It is not uncommon for Basque obituaries to include a sentence or a paragraph of the role herding or working in the boardinghouses or other Basque establishments played in the lives of the deceased. Readers learn of Basques who herded sheep for 10 years trailing them 300 miles from Jarbidge to Duck Water and back (2014, 20 July). Stories of Basque women working at the boardinghouses can be found in the obituaries and their roles of helping Basque herders transition to American culture (2015, 8 December; 2016, 20 April). Sometimes shepherding is mentioned even if the deceased did not care for the work (2015, 6 October). Other Basques felt at home herding and working with sheep (Reno Gazette-Journal 2009, 11 July; Elko Daily Free Press 2012, 2 July; 2015, 20 June; 2016, 11 May). Herding sheep brought many of the Basques in the early and mid-twentieth century to the American West. As shown in many obituaries, it is a significant part of their narrative, whether they stayed in the industry for 3 years or 50 years.

**The Role of Museums and Cultural Centers**

Museums and cultural centers can have varying degrees of success in educating people about their communities. Utt and Olsen (2007) suggest that successful museums find ways to make the heritage of places relevant and engaging to the community and visitors. One way to accomplish that is through involving the community and bringing local voices into the exhibits. The Northeast Nevada Museum (NNM) and the Western Folklife Center (WFC) have both played a role in highlighting elements of the Basque sheep story in northeastern Nevada and educating the general public. The WFC more
often involves local voices. NNM’s permanent Basque exhibit, however, plays an important role in educating visitors about the role of the Basques and their involvement in the sheep industry.

The Northeastern Nevada Museum opened in 1968 with a mission to preserve northeastern Nevada heritage. It does so with several permanent exhibits as well as temporary and rotating exhibits. The Basques are a significant part of the region’s heritage. Therefore, the museum has dedicated a small, permanent exhibit to the Basque history in the area. Part of the exhibit highlights the role of the Basques in the sheep industry. The display includes a mini sheep wagon, aspen trees with Basque carvings, sheep shearing information, and historical photos showing sheepherder’s bread at sheep camp, sheep dust as a result of trailing thousands of sheep, sheep shearing activities, and local Basque herders on the job.

The museum also has a permanent art collection featuring artwork depicting the cultural history of the American West with an emphasis on northeastern Nevada. Idaho artist, Dyrk Godby, donated a painting titled “Sheep Camp” (Elko Daily Press 2007, 28 February). The painting shows a Basque herder near his sheep wagon in the mountains.

Periodically, the NNM displays an exhibit featuring the Basques and their involvement in the local and regional sheep industry. In 1999, the museum brought in the traveling exhibit *Amerikaniuak! Basques in the High Desert* from the High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon. The exhibit was on display for six months (Boyd 1998). In 2016, the Northeastern Nevada Museum, in conjunction with Great Basin College and the Virtual Humanities Center of Great Basin College, created an exhibit dedicated to the
Basques of Elko. The exhibit, titled *Elkokoak: The Basques of Elko* was both an in-museum exhibit and continues to be an online exhibit. The online exhibit includes oral histories of local Basque residents, historical articles on Basques in northeastern Nevada that have been published in *Northeastern Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* since 1971, a series of essays written by Elko native Vince Juaristi on the Basque experience in America, and every National Basque Festival program since 1965. With an online presence, the exhibit reached a much wider audience than it would have if it only remained inside the museum’s walls. Basques from all over the American West as well as those in Spain and France have been able to interact with the exhibit. Much of the Basque history in the American West begins with their involvement in the sheep industry, and the exhibit allows thousands of Basques and non-Basques to learn about the legacy of the Basque herders.

The Western Folklife Center was founded in 1980 and “uses story and cultural expression to connect the American West to the world” and “explore and give voice to traditional and dynamic cultures of the American West” (WFC 2016). Stories, as told by local and regional individuals, are an important part of the WFC’s programs and exhibits. In 2016, they began working with nationally known StoryCorps and uploading to their website the stories of local residents in order to preserve the everyday experiences of those who also live in the American West.

The WFC has also focused on the stories of western sheepmen and women. Their Sheep Ranching in the American West project includes multiple endeavors. One project was the traveling exhibition titled *Trailing the Year: The Human Landscape of Sheep*
Ranching in the American West. The 2006 exhibit featured stories of Nevada sheep ranchers that highlighted their work in Nevada’s landscapes. In 2007, also as part of their Sheep Ranching project, the WFC premiered the CD, Songs and Stories from Sheepherding, at their National Poetry Gathering. The songs, poeties, and stories capture the character and nostalgia of western sheepmen and women, from Navajo, Peruvian, and Basque herders to traveling shearing crews. While it is not limited to the Basques in Elko County, the experiences, poems, songs, and stories conveyed on the CD are familiar to many western sheepmen and women, whether they are Basque or not. The CD as a whole captures a sense of regional character. Similar to place-defining literature and artwork, the songs and stories represent communities in the West and provide insights into the region’s place identities (Shortridge 1991; Baker 2003).

Knowledge and appreciation of the past is vital in the formation of identity (Lowenthal 1979). Museums play a role in bringing awareness of a region’s past to people. The Northeast Nevada Museum and the Western Folklife Center both play a role in educating locals and outsiders about the Basque sheep story in northeastern Nevada. When the WFC creates an exhibit on sheep ranching, they emphasize local voices. Sheep ranching, however, is not a story that is frequently told. Therefore, the NNM’s permanent Basque exhibit that features their association with the sheep industry is important in keeping people aware of the legacy of the Basque sheepherder in the American West.
The turnoff for Pete and Rama Paris’s Willow Creek Ranch near Jiggs, Nevada, is easy to spot with the large, metal Paris Livestock sign. The silhouettes represent the place with cattle, sheep, horses, and the Ruby Mountains. Pete grew up around sheep and cattle, and he has raised both. As a boy, when he worked with his family, he imagined he would be a cowman. He had little interest in raising sheep (Paris 2005). His grandfather, Beltran Paris, used to tell him that he would make a good sheepman, and after working with sheep for two years beginning in 1976 with his uncle, Pete finally took a liking to the sheep business. By 2013, as we talked at his ranch where ewes were lambing and cows calving, Pete’s sentiments toward sheep had changed drastically, and he fondly said, “The sheep are my passion” (personal communication, March 2013). Talking with Pete, it is clear that he is enthusiastic about raising healthy sheep and the western sheep industry.

Pete and Rama have two daughters. They and their families were not going to take over the ranch, and with the labor intensity of raising sheep, Pete and Rama made the decision to sell their sheep outfit. In the early 2000s, Pete began working with David Little, who had raised sheep in Yerington, Nevada. For several years, David learned about the area and raising sheep on the open range. The transition has been slow, but David Little and his family now own Pete’s former sheep outfit. Pete, however, could not sell all of his sheep and continues to keep a flock at the ranch. He also continues to help David some with the sheep, particularly when they dock the lambs in the spring and ship the fattened lambs in the fall.
Family, Place, and Heritage

Pete loves talking about his family, the sheep ranching traditions of the Basques in Nevada, his memories and stories of the place, and the history of the area. He is a third generation Basque rancher. His grandfather, Beltran Paris, migrated from a Basque province in France, in 1912. Initially he herded sheep in Wyoming, and in 1918, he relocated to Butte Valley, Nevada where he started his own sheep ranch. Pete learned not only about the logistics of raising sheep from his grandpa, but he also learned and followed his traditions, such as baking sheepherder’s bread, providing mutton to the herders, and spending time with the herders at sheep camp when he delivered provisions.

“They [the herders] need to talk to people, too. I try to do things the same way I grew up doing them” (Paris 2005, 51). In his quest to carry on the traditions, a connection to the past endures when Basques in the American West were synonymous with sheep.

Even though the Paris family is not in charge of the sheep anymore, David Little learned some of their Basque traditions and continues to carry them on. One tradition that is associated with the Basques in the West is the method of docking the lambs. During docking, the tails and testes of lambs are removed. Many western ranchers, particularly those whose sheep are in more confined areas, use rubber bands and emasculators. Using rubber bands is a slower process, but when sheep are not in a range environment, it is safer in terms of potential infections. The Basque tradition calls for a knife and teeth. Those who continue to use this method insist, like Pete, that “it really is faster, cleaner and less painful for the lambs” (Paris 2005, 53). Pete reminisced about his daughters bringing friends to docking day. It was always a shock to them to see how the ranchers
removed the testes, but some visitors felt compelled to try the technique themselves. Pete laughed as he shared stories of individuals taking on the challenge of castrating at least one lamb (personal communication, July 2014). While David Little continues to dock the lambs in the same manner, he does not carry on the tradition of frying the testicles. Pete said that part is more of a Basque cultural tradition, and instead, Pete takes them home and invites his Basque friends over for a feast.

The era of the Basque sheepherder ended years ago. When Pete Paris sold his sheep, another era came to an end in Elko County. He was the last active Basque-American sheep rancher in Elko County. Although there are still two large sheep operations in the county (as of 2014), the Basques have departed. With their departure, some Basque sheep traditions, such as arborglyph carvings, the baking of Basque sheepherder’s bread for herders, and small Basque gatherings at sheep camp, are also fading. David Little carries on some of the Basque traditions, but he is not aware of many of the stories and social memories of the Basque sheepmen. He does not understand the Basque language so he cannot read many of the aspen carvings. When Pete sees Basque names on the trees, he can usually recall some story associated with the name, whether it is his personal story or one he heard from somebody else. As a whole, the Basque shepherding era is over. The Paris family, however, continues to share their own stories and memories as well as the memories their parents and grandparents shared with them. These stories connect the Paris family to the place and their Basque sheep ranching heritage.
The Paris’s Landscapes

Pete and Rama Paris have not lived their entire lives on the ranch they now own. Pete grew up ranching closer to Ely, Nevada. For a short time, he then ran a sheep operation in Iowa Canyon, between Austin and Battle Mountain, Nevada. In 1981, he relocated to Elko County to begin ranching, and through the years, expanded the operations. He purchased all of his sheep in 1982 and 1985. In 2005, Willow Creek Ranch became part of the Paris Livestock operation. Even though he did not grow up on his current ranch or raise sheep in the same allotments, he has spent a considerable amount of time working in these landscapes, tending his sheep, and creating numerous memories.

The House and Home Ranch: Pete and Rama Paris have owned both cattle and sheep. Their house, however, shows that they place considerable value on sheep. A mailbox at the end of their driveway has a sheep hanging from it with “Paris” etched on the side. Upon entering their home, there is a conspicuous amount of sheep decor and printed photos. Local lamb, butchered in a building near the Paris home, is not an unusual meal at the dinner table. Even though Pete and Rama do not own the thousands of sheep they once did, talk of sheep, from markets to where Pete’s former bands of sheep are currently located, are often discussed in the Paris kitchen.

Within reach of the kitchen table are magazine articles that feature members from each generation of the Paris family. One article focuses on Pete’s grandfather, Beltran Paris (Larronde 1982). The story details Beltran’s experience as a foreign immigrant who owned 6,000 sheep of his own. Beltran taught Pete a lot about the industry and the
Basque traditions, and in a more recent article, Pete shares some of the values Beltran taught him (Paris 2005). The article, written by Pete’s daughter, highlights Pete’s experiences as a Basque sheep rancher in Nevada. The story details his early beginnings in the industry, some of his memories of sheep ranching, and the seasonal round of activities. Pete’s mother, Mary Jean, migrated to Nevada from the French side of the Basque Country. In the article, Mary Jean shares her experiences of living in a Nazi-occupied country, migrating to the United States, meeting her husband, and raising a family on their Nevada ranch (Hadley 2009). The magazine articles and their placement in the house show the importance of family to Pete and Rama. They also reveal the readiness of the Paris family to share their family’s stories and memories with others.

Willow Creek, part of the Paris Livestock ranch holdings, is three and half miles southwest of Pete and Rama’s house. A barn, hired workers’ housing, trucks, corrals, hay fields, and pastures comprise the ranch. Although Pete and Rama no longer own thousands of sheep, their small flock of “ranch sheep” roam the pastures nearby. “The sheep have the run of the place,” Pete said as we watched the ewes graze contently (personal communication, September 24, 2013). There is no shortage of food for them, and they frequently are spoiled with alfalfa.

The Countryside: Canyons, Mountains, and Sageland: Northeast Nevada feels like open range country with vistas filled with sagebrush, short grasses, juniper bushes, and more animals than people. To find feed throughout the year, sheep were and continue to be trailed for hundreds of miles. Although the Paris ranch headquarters are located in Elko County, they consider parts of White Pine County and Nye County as home turf,
too. Most of the land the sheep graze is public. Pete estimates that the sheep are on public lands ninety-nine percent of the time. Throughout the year, the sheep and herders walk hundreds of miles in search of grasses and shrubs to feed their animals (Figure 4-27).

Figure 4-27. Paris Livestock sheep grazing route and BLM allotments. Map by author.
Lambing begins on the northern end of Newark Valley in the Diamond Mountains foothills. As the ewes lamb and continue to move northward, bands of sheep consisting of ewes and their lambs are created and grouped together. Each band, consisting of approximately 1000 ewes plus their lambs, enters the summer grazing allotments in the Ruby Mountains at different times and places. The first band enters the Mitchell Creek allotment. The second and third bands enter the southern Ruby Mountains. The fourth band heads further north in the Rubies. For several weeks, herders move the sheep around with the goal to meet near the Smith Creek Ranch in September for shipping. Once the lambs are shipped, they begin heading south to the winter range (Figure 4-28). They again pass through Newark Valley and continue south to Duckwater Valley and graze alongside the Pancake Range. When the bands reach Highway 6, they begin to head north again. They pass through the Sand Springs Valley, Little Smoky Valley, and all come together in the northern part of the Pancake Range for shearing. After shearing, they head north to the lambing grounds, and the cycle repeats itself year after year.
When Pete was running the Paris sheep outfit, he was working in multiple counties. He spent many hours and made many memories in the truck driving to and from the various allotments. He remembers driving around the sagebrush valleys and into the mountains with his daughter as they went to sheep camp or completed errands, such as checking the water tanks. During the winter, hauling water to the sheep camps located 100 miles away was not uncommon. Pete Paris has spent countless hours driving, riding, and walking around the Nevada landscapes where his sheep and cattle grazed. While doing so, he kept a close eye on the land for both he and Rama have a desire to care for the land and keep it sustainable. Pete commented repeatedly that “This is good country,” and he wants to keep it that way (personal communication, March 11, 2014; September 5, 2014).
Although Pete has not walked the allotments in the same way as the herders have, he does have memories attached to different landscapes as he worked and visited them often. Some allotments he prefers more than others, such as Mitchell Creek and Cass House. Lindsay Creek is pretty, he said, but there was always something wrong there. He remembers other allotments as being too tree heavy (personal communication, July 2014). Pete has general thoughts and associations with the allotments, but he also has specific memories of the places.

One of Pete’s enjoyments was visiting the sheep camps and bringing the herders provisions. David Little now visits the camps, and Pete said, “I really miss the sheep and going to camp” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Many experiences were had around each sheep camp. Pete enjoyed taking the time to visit with the herders at each camp. “Business” talk was common, such as the condition of the sheep and the land and when and where camp would be moved next. Talk was also more personal at sheep camp. Pete is of Basque heritage, and when the herders were Basque, he could connect with them by speaking the same language and knowing and appreciating the Basque culture.

One can see for miles across the sagebrush valleys and towards the Ruby Mountains. Pete remembers the Rubies “back in the day.” As we drove around the range, Pete pointed towards the Rubies and said, “There used to be dust smoke from sheep in that canyon and that canyon” (personal communication, July 2014). He remembers others telling him of 55 bands of sheep grazing in the Ruby Mountains during the 1960s. Today, there are five, all former sheep bands of Pete and Rama’s.
Pete, like other Basque herders and sheepmen, has memories of carving aspen trees. He remembers carving trees with his daughters. They were mostly simple inscriptions, such as names and dates. Many of the carvings by his daughters are along Smith Creek. We came across one of Pete’s carvings that said “Pete Paris 6-21-04” (Figure 4-29; Figure 4-30). That was the year Paris Livestock acquired that allotment. He recalled that they used to eat lunch in that spot, “so I guess I wanted to put off work for awhile and carved that,” he said with a laugh (personal communication, September 5, 2014). As we drove and walked around looking at other carvings, Pete had many stories about the carvers. Upon seeing some names, he would say, “That brings back memories!” Some of the memories are of the difficulties with a particular herder. Many others, however, are fond memories of quality herders.

Figure 4-29. Pete Paris signed his name on an aspen tree, marking the year he purchased a particular allotment. Photo by author, September 5, 2014.
As we looked around the Nevada landscape, Pete said, “This is really good country. Good cattle country. Good sheep country” (personal communication, March 11, 2014). Part of the “good country” that Pete knows so well also includes memories. There are memories of Pete baking his famous sheepherder’s bread and delivering it to the herders at sheep camp. There are memories of friends and family gathering at sheep camp sharing not only food, but news and stories. There are memories of driving too fast in a pickup truck chasing down a ewe to bring her back to the herd (Paris 2005). The place where fall shipping and docking day happened are filled with significance and stories with friends, family, and friends of friends. Pete and Rama no longer own 5,000 sheep, but they still own the memories they have of raising sheep in northeastern Nevada’s landscapes.
Dan Arreola (2002, 162) commented that “Foodways, or the practices of food preference, preparation, and consumption are regionally specific as well as ethnically distinctive.” Food is an important part of the Basque culture, and it helps to define regional place identity in northeastern Nevada. As the local newspaper put it, “They [the Basques] work hard, they play even harder, and when the day is done, they eat well – very well” (Elko Daily Free Press 1997, 1 July). While talking with Basques in Elko, the topic of food is likely to enter the conversation. When Basques migrated to the American West, they transferred some of their traditions to rural western communities, the isolated and open winter ranges of the West, and the high mountain country during the summer. They also had to adapt to a new environment. Basque-American cuisine is the result (Oiarzabal 2006). Bread, lamb, garlic, cabbage soup, chorizos, and rice pudding are important staples in the Basque-American diet whether it is in the home, on the range, or in the local Basque restaurants. Further, it is not just the food itself that is important to the Basque culture, but also the rituals of preparing and eating it together. Food traditions bring people together, are used to celebrate cultural cohesion, and play a role in creating a distinct place identity (Brown and Mussell 1984).

One of the staples in the Basque herders’ diets was large, round loafs of bread baked in a Dutch oven. The sheepherder’s bread, as it is called, is simple. It contains just four ingredients that include regular white flour, water, salt, and a yeast starter (Mallea-Olaetxe 2000). Herders and camp tenders used to use a sourdough starter, but according to Mallea-Olaetxe, many began to switch to a dry yeast in the 1950s. While there are now
recipes for the traditional bread, one Basque said in the 1960s, “Never have I seen a
Basque recipe. We cook from the head and the heart. We coax out the flavor with slow
cooking” (Elko Daily Free Press 1966, 24 June). The slow cooking was accomplished by
placing the dough in a Dutch oven in a large, outdoor brick oven or buried in the ground
with hot coals (Figure 4-31). Whether baked in an oven or the ground, the bread has
become synonymous with sheepmen and Basques in northeastern Nevada. Kent McAdoo
lived at sheep camp with Basque herders for a year between 1973 and 1974. He recalled
the frequent ritual of not only baking the bread, but serving it, too. He said, “They hand
you the loaf, and…typically, most of the guys would just put it up against their chest, saw
off a piece, hand it to you, and you didn’t ask, “What did you wipe with that?” That bread
was amazing! We went through a lot of it” (personal communication, June 29, 2013).
Many photos from the past that are displayed in restaurants and part of personal
collections have at least one photo of the bread baking or bread serving ritual (Figure 4-
32).
Figure 4-31. Cooking Sheepherder’s Bread in a Dutch oven buried in the ground (The Star Hotel).
In their family memoir, *Sheep Tales*, Von and Marie Sorensen reminisced about the Basque herders and camptenders they employed. She recalled meals they cooked and ingredients they preferred, particularly garlic, which they had to restock whenever they went to town. Marie remembers that “the men could not cook without it, and could hardly eat anything that did not have a lot of garlic added” (n.d., 83). Pete Paris said instead of cooking and eating chicken soup when one is sick, the Basques prepare garlic soup. Traditional garlic soup consists of oil, garlic, day old French bread, eggs, parsley, and water.
Basque women used to make homemade chorizos for the men at sheep camp and boarders at the hotels. Theresa Jauregui Comish and Anita Jauregui McAdam remember the women who worked in the Basque hotels would make their own chorizos. They would prepare them with “lots of garlic and lots of red peppers” and hang them in the kitchen (Pecharroman 1998b, 8). Traditional Basque chorizos are made with ingredients such as pork, beef, peppers, garlic, and paprika. Kent McAdoo recalled what a treat it was to receive homemade chorizos during the winter at sheep camp. “They would bring them [the chorizos] out to the sheep camps in these five gallon cans packed in grease…Our camp went through two five gallon cans of chorizos - myself, the herder, the camp tender - in just about 2.5 months. That’s a lot of chorizos!” (personal communication, June 29, 2013). Preparing chorizos is a community affair for some Basques. Alfonso and Mary Ygoa said, “We are all like a family…When there is work to do…six or seven friends will show up…To make chorizos, all here. It’s like that. We don’t do things alone. We always get help from somebody…I think it’s a beautiful thing” (Reig 2010).

When the Basques lived out on the range, they had to learn to cook out there. Joe Sarasua recalled learning to cook over an open fire and with a Dutch oven underground. He prepared many meals, including bread, fried lamb, stewed lamb, soup made with lamb bones, sheep heads, and liver. Sarasua maintained that he preferred all forms of lamb and their parts over steak (Hadley 1980). Juan Juaristi worked with sheep in Nevada for over sixty years. According to his brother, Juan “get to be one good cook” and if necessary, would feed an entire crew (Elko Daily Free Press 2012, 2 July).
Food has always been an important part of the National Basque Festival. At the 22nd annual festival, Bob Echeverria, said, “one of the most important highlights of the festival will be food” (Elko Daily Free Press 1985, 2 July, 1). One of the traditions of the festival is the Sunday Basque picnic. The picnic has been a highlight since the first festival, and it continues to be a highlight today. Many of the same foods are served year after year, including steak, lamb, beans, bread, and red wine. Some of the lamb and beef are donated by local ranchers.

Many who visit a Basque restaurant in the West remember the abundance of food they were served. The tradition is to have bread and cabbage soup as appetizers along with spaghetti, green beans, and the main course of either steak or lamb. Not only are Basque restaurants in Nevada associated with abundance, but they are also known for their tender lamb dishes. Basque restaurants, particularly the former hotels, also feature certain drinks. Red wine and picon punches are frequently served at Basque restaurants. Depending on the ranching outfit, Basque herders used to periodically be given some red wine while herding sheep. Red wine continues to be a Basque favorite. At the restaurants, wine is typically served out of a carafe when eating dinner. Another drink, the Picon Punch, has been called the Basque cocktail of the West and appears to have originated in the American West among Basque-Americans (Zubiri 2006). The drink is made with Amer Picon or Torani Amer, soda water, grenadine, brandy, and lemon peel. There was even a push to have the picon punch named Nevada’s state drink. William Horne believed the drink was an appropriate choice based on the Basque culture in the state,
particularly in northern Nevada (Las Vegas Sun 2013, 18 May). While the *picon punch* was not named Nevada’s state drink, it remains the “Basque cocktail of the West.”

**Creative Works – *Bertsolaritza***

Artists are influenced by landscapes and places, and their creative works also help define regional place identity. Sculptors, painters, writers, and musicians have shown a great deal of appreciation and awareness for place and culture (Tuan 1992). Their creations can capture the sense of a place in a particular time period through descriptions and illustrations of landscapes, characters, and societies. The terms “artist” and “creative works” encompass a broad spectrum of people and media. Leo Zonn (1990) suggests that media should not be limited in scope, but rather that it should include any mechanism that has the power to convey information about a place. Therefore, there are many ways people may express information about a place and their perceptions of landscapes, but “language and art are particularly important tools by which to make particular locales resonate with deep meanings” (Berlo 2006, 40). Different means of expression resonate with different cultural groups and the societies that are part of a culture. Within a culture, men and women see the landscape differently and express it with their art in different ways, often based on the gender roles of both labor and craft production. Basque men used, and continue to use, language to express meanings of their place both as it relates to raising sheep in the American West and also as a result of caring for sheep.

The Basques of the American West have used their knowledge and experiences with sheep to incorporate their experiences in a traditional Basque endeavor -
Bertsolaritza. Bertsolaritza is a form of poetry. Performers improvise and sing themed narratives (Mallea-Olaexta 2003). In contrast to the types of narratives Basque sang in the Old Country, those who migrated to the American West as shepherders frequently sang and continue to sing about their experiences trailing and herding sheep in the wide open spaces of Nevada and other parts of the West. Basque bertsolaritza is a creative work that, like American music lyrics, can be useful in understanding place, place identity, and the human perceptions of particular landscapes and certain ways of life (Gumprecht 1998).

Many foreign-born Basque men in northeastern Nevada today migrated to the United States as shepherders in the first three quarters of the 20th century. Most were only shepherders for one or two contracts, with each contract being three years. For many of them, it was a short part of their life as once their contracts were expired, they either went back to their Basque province or they found employment in a different sector of the American economy. Consequently, few Basques are involved in the sheep industry today. However, they have not forgotten the Basque association and involvement in the sheep industry. Indeed, they have incorporated their sheering past into bertsolaritza. Bertsolaritza is an art form where language is paramount. Performers, called bertsolaris, improvise narratives that are rhymed and sung. Joxe Mallea-Olaetxe, a Basque historian, calls it “rhymed-and-sung storytelling” (2003, 10).

Traditionally in Nevada and other parts of the American West, bertsolaritza events took place at family gatherings, among friends, in bars, and in sheep camps. Northeastern Nevada events were more infrequent than some Basque communities, such
as Gardnerville, Nevada or Bakersfield, California, but the *bertsolaris* did perform at least a few times a year. When Elko began holding its National Basque Festival in 1964, *berstolaritza* exhibitions were sometimes included in the program. Today, informal events still occur, but it is more common for *bertsolaris* to perform in front of a large audience at judged exhibitions or at regional and national Basque picnics, such as the Elko National Basque Festival (Figure 4-33). At judged exhibitions, performers are given topics, such as sheepherding and ranching, gambling, patriotic issues, or animal themes, and they banter back and forth by composing *bertso*, or verses. The content tends to be argumentative and pointed, for performances are judged not only by adherence of rhythm and rhyming in a *bertso*, but also by who can get the loudest response or the last laugh from the audience (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003).

Figure 4-33. Two *bertsolaris* perform at the National Basque Festival. Photo by author, July 14, 2014.
The *bertsolari* is a commoner, in touch with the ordinary, everyday experiences of the Basque people. In the American West, many of the everyday experiences of Basque immigrants at one time involved sheep, whether it was shepherding, sheep ranching, boarding herders at the Basque boardinghouses, or cooking and dancing among sheepmen and women. When a *bertsolaritza* event takes place and the singers perform, whether in an exhibition event or informally in a bar, people listen intently. It is theirs and the audience’s heritage they are singing about. Because they speak of the lives of many Basque immigrants, writers and historians can find relevance in their creative narratives. Mallea-Olaetxe (2003, 8) suggests that “those who want to understand the Basque culture or seek to penetrate into the caverns of the Basque mind, there is no greater tool than improvised poetry.” Woods and Gritzner (1990, 232) suggest that some country music is “a product and expression of the folk culture of America’s laboring, blue collar class.” Incorporating shepherding experiences into the traditional craft of *bertsolaritza* is a product and expression of the folk culture of the American West’s Basque immigrants.

Although there has been little research specifically on *bertsolaritza*, geographers have explored music and the importance of geography and place. The *bertsolari* has much in common with musicians. Both produce narratives sung to a melody. One difference is that a *bertso* is composed on the spot. *Bertsos* are a “one-try art with no second chance” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 8). The parallel to music, however, is the lyrics and their “perfect evocation of a time and place” (Gumprecht 1998, 78). *Bertsolaritza*
provides access to the life of a Basque sheepherder in the high deserts and mountainous
country of the American West during the 20th century (Mallea-Olaetxe 2005).

With many of the bertsolari’s narratives, place is important, whether that is the
high deserts of the American West or the cities in the Basque Country. Mallea-Olaetxe
(2003, 45) wrote, “Old Country and American bards live in very different environments,
and that is reflected in their poetry.” He continues, writing, “Most of the Basques who
make their homes here empathize with their peasant past. Most of them underwent at
least a few years of very primitive lifestyle, that of sheepherding.” Mallea-Olaetxe has
traveled across the West attending both formal and informal bertsoaritza events and has
noted that topics in the American West repeatedly include sheepherding and ranching.

The verses pertaining to sheep ranching highlight certain themes related to place
identity, principally the seasonal round of activities, the visual landscapes, and life in
those landscapes. Raising sheep revolves around the seasons. Author Ivan Doig, who had
great familiarity with sheep, has been cited for his ability to powerfully evoke a place
using place-based imagery and language in his novels. William Wyckoff (2013) explores
themes that contribute to Doig’s place-defining novels, and one theme is Doig’s
descriptions of the seasonal round of activities and the weather that accompanies the
seasons. Seasonal activities define places for those working in them. Martin Goicoechea,
one of the most well-known bertsoaritza performers in the United States, sang about his
life as a herder in Wyoming and highlighted the seasonal round of activities. He sang
how “every year was the same routine.” He began with early spring, singing, “After the
shearing / lambs by the hundreds were born / everyday among the sagebrush.” Moving on
to the summer months, Goicoechea reminisced, “In July we went to the high country / to live under the big trees. / In that place, we found / clean water and fresh grasses / the beautiful herd of sheep / and the lambs fattening.” After summer, “toward the end of September / it was time to return. / Afterward in the fall, / before we started winter chores, / it was time to weigh and sell the lambs / at the beginning of the month of October” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 347-348). Leon Bereau was a current Nevada sheepherder when he sang about life as a herder being inseparable from the seasonal round of activities. His narrative was titled A Sheepherder Narrates his Life, and he began his narration by singing, “Let me just tell you then / all about our lifestyle. / During the summer we go up to the mountains; / during the winter to the lowlands. / After eating the pasture in the high country, / we go to the desert country. That is how the sheepherders / in Nevada land live” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 139). Each season had its round of activities that was associated with a particular time of the year and in particular places, from the green high country to the sagebrush desert.

The bertsolari familiar with sheepherding also sings about the visual landscape, which usually included wide-open and lonely settings. Goicoechea, still singing about his life as a herder, sang how “the desert and the mountains / are all enormous” and that “all around me I could see nothing / but sheep and lonely desert and mountains” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 346-348). Sheepherders in Nevada walked hundreds of miles every year as they trailed the sheep from the high, mountainous country to the lower, desert country. They became intimately familiar with the landscape. The bertsolari often sings of traversing the western landscapes. An unknown herder recorded his verses about the life
of a sheepherder in the 1920s. He begins by writing, “In America I have done a lot of walking / I am thinking that there are some very sad places / always with sheep in difficult mountains” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 56). The landscapes were lonely, but occasionally a bertsolari highlights a pleasant perception of herding in western landscapes. Singing about the coming of spring, one bertsolari sang, “The shepherders, too, love / the green shoots on the mountains / that provide plenty of feed for the sheep / besides the bonus, which is the songs of the birds” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 64). When singing of the seasonal round of activities, Goicoechea also used more appealing imagery when he sang of big trees, clean water, fresh grasses, and beautiful sheep in the summer high country.

Finally, the third place-related theme is closely linked with the second theme, for when the bertsolari sings about the struggles of working, it takes place in a forbidding landscape. When Basques migrated to the American West, many of them had experience working with sheep as Basque families had sheep in the Basque provinces. The differences in shepherding in the Basque provinces and the American West, however, were immense. In the Basque provinces, families typically had between 50 and 200 sheep and would move them between their home and the pastures that were not too far away. They rarely spent more than a couple of nights alone with the sheep. In the American West, sheepherders were alone in an unfamiliar landscape and in charge of two thousand sheep. One bertsolari sang, “Once every eight days, the camptender shows up” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 350). Otherwise, the shepherder was alone with the sheep, his dogs, a horse or donkey, and the surrounding lands. In his bertsos, Gratien Alfaro captures the
loneliness the herders felt in the forbidding lands they lived and herded in. “I became a sheepherder in the mountains, / in the dead of winter” and “it was then that I found out / what loneliness was. It was then that I began to appreciate / the good family I had left. / Utterly alone on the mountain, / the dog was my companion” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 353). Bertsolari performer, Jesus “Jess” Arriada, sang about coming to the United States from the Basque Country. His first experience as a sheepherder in the western mountains was overwhelming. He met the former sheepherder at sheep camp and according to his narrative, “He told me that as far as he knew, there were about two thousand sheep. / They were spread far and wide all over the mountain; / it seemed to me that all the sheep in America were there” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 363). Arriada in a different bertsolaritza event sang of his experiences living and working in wide open and lonely landscapes, singing “two thousand sheep with two dogs / I was stuck between the mountains, / we learned only too well / what solitude and the desert were all about” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 354). Perhaps Leon Bereau captures the angst of sheepherding in Nevada best since he was still herding in 1990 when he sang, “No one can imagine / what those mountains are like. / Often we cannot get through / the boulders and the rocks, / the creeks and lonely canyons.” He continues describing the agony of looking for lost lambs in winter, singing, “Engulfed in the fog and the snow, / we endured plenty of such struggles / on these mountains” (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003, 140-141).

Gender and Bertsolaritza

Bertsolaritza is a male dominated event, both in the American West and in the Basque Country (Echeverria 2001). When it comes to incorporating sheep narratives in a
ber
tso, it is especially a male domain, for it was men, not women, who were the Basque shepherders. Even in the Basque Country, working with sheep was considered a masculine role entrusted to men and boys (Bullen 2003).

There are no known Basque-American women in the American West who compose bertsos professionally. There are, however, Basque women who participate in bertsolaritza events held in Spain and France (Echeverria 2001). Two young female performers who were visiting the American West were taken to an aspen grove in western Nevada that was a sheep camp tended by Basque men during the 1920s and 1930s. As was common amongst the Basque shepherders, they occupied their time and their mind by carving figures and words onto the aspen trunks (Mallea-Olaetxe 2000). The women who were visiting one such grove improvised several bertsos that revealed their reactions to the carvings, particularly the carvings of female figures that some believe verge on pornography. The two women interpreted the carvings of females as a way for the sheepherder to cope with his loneliness, and the artistic pornography sketches as a necessity (Mallea-Olaetxe 2003). Although women may not have experienced shepherding in the American West, and therefore they cannot adequately sing of that way of life, they can, and do, react to the vestiges that remain of the sheeping landscapes.

When formal and informal bertsolaritza events are held in the American West, both men and women are in the audience and react to the verses. Some men and women will have relatable experiences to those described in the verses. Women may have helped some with the sheep and lambs, worked with herders in boardinghouses, brought provisions to herders, or been part of a sheep ranching family. Other women may have no
experience with the industry. Hearing the verses and scenes described is a way for men and women with plenty of experience or no experience to reflect on the Basque heritage in the American West and the ways it has shaped their community’s collective experiences.

_Bertsolaritza and Place_

Sheep ranching is a rural, and rather traditional way of life that reinforces its cultural memory through creative endeavors. Different people choose to represent their memories and heritage in different ways based on their cultural traits. The Basque tradition of _bertsolaritza_ diffused to the American West with Basque men who migrated to the West as shepherders. Basque men continue the _bertsolaritza_ tradition by singing about their experiences of shepherding and sheep ranching in the landscapes of the American West.

Martin Goicoechea said, “Everything you sing is based on your knowledge and how well you know the topic” (personal communication, July 6, 2014). _Bertso_ verses about western sheep ranching require knowledge and either a present or a past connection with the land. Basque _bertsolaris_ are no longer trailing sheep across the high desert, but their memories and experiences continue to shape their craft. Landscapes and the places they lived and worked influenced the craft of Basque _bertsolaris_ in the American West. In addition to the effect of the surrounding environment on the Basque art, _bertsolaris_ use their art form to express what their surroundings and experiences mean to them. The verses carry a strong imprint of the place in which they were first inspired. The _bertsolaris_ expresses what the life of a shepherder was in Nevada and the surrounding region with
language. He expresses the loneliness and struggles that the landscapes presented him with as he herded sheep. As long as the verses are translated, an outsider is able to fathom the angst and the meanings conveyed about a landscape and a place in time. Landscapes, combined with the heritage of raising sheep in particular places, have influenced the creative works of Basque *bertsolaris*; they have the power to create and shape images of places. As a result, insiders and outsiders can learn about life as a sheepherder in the Nevada landscape.

**Conclusion**

Elko County has been shaped by a variety of people and activities. The Basques are one group that have left an enduring legacy on the landscape, in the social memories of the community, and on the place identity of Elko. Through symbols, language, and stories, many Basques and non-Basques still associate western Basques with sheep, despite there being few Basques left in the industry. One Basque sheep rancher said, “their identity remains firmly tied to sheep, as well as to the rugged sagebrush steppe…this is what made us who we are” (O’Connor 2012). Just as place names can stick to landscapes over several generations (Hufford 1987), the Basques continue to stick with an identity associated with sheep and shepherders.

While there is general knowledge of the historical connection of Elko Basques and sheepherding, personal memories and stories are fading as Basques who were directly involved in the sheep industry are becoming fewer. Third and fourth generation Basques do not have personal experiences of trailing sheep hundreds of miles each year.
through lonely landscapes, living in or visiting sheep camps, eating traditional
sheepherder’s bread or lamb stew in Nevada’s open ranges, or carving their names or
thoughts on an aspen tree while their band of sheep were bedded down. Some third and
fourth generation Basques, however, do not want their generation or future generations to
forget the stories of the Basque heritage in the American West. There are families that are
intentional about sharing the stories of the first and even seconds generations’
experiences. They visit the aspen groves where their relatives carved the trees. They have
historic photos accessible, either in photo albums or on the walls of their homes. Family
stories are shared, such as the first generation’s experience migrating to Nevada’s open
spaces and working with sheep. During an interview, a second generation Basque said
her dad talked about the loneliness of herding sheep and how he looked forward to
festivals and gatherings so he could see and talk with other people (personal
communication, July 10, 2014). She now shares those stories with her children. Similar to
the discussion in *A Rainbow in the Night* (2009) where Afrikaaners continued to keep one
or two goats or sheep as a symbolic act, some Basque families continue to keep a handful
of sheep. Pete Paris is one. Mikel and Anamarie Lopategui are another Elko family that
keep a small farm flock. John Ascuaga, an Idaho Basque is another. He said, “My father
came in 1900…I still keep a flock of sheep to remember my heritage” (NPR 2008).

While some Basque families work to remember and pass on sheep ranching
stories of the past, many do not. Elko and the Basque community have changed. Former
Basque herders reminisce of the days when Basques, sheep, and Elko were all
synonymous. In the movie, *Amerikanuak* (Reig 2010), the directors recorded a
conversation between the owner of the Star Hotel and two former herders. Their conversation captures how Elko and the Basque community have changed.

Bartolo: “In Elko there have always been a lot of Basques. Even when I arrived, there were a lot of them. Nowadays nobody comes anymore. Nobody. And that’s how all this got lost. Those times, there were so many Basques here. Here, in the Star Hotel…There were so many people.”

Scotty: “And that’s my job at the Star. While I’m here, I’ll take care of the Basques…for 10 or 15 years that’ll be my job to continue the Basque lifestyle. I was brought up like that. I don’t speak perfect Basque, but good enough.”

Bartolo: “Those days we missed our home and now we miss the Star. Those days when we were in the mountain and now in the village. Really homesick. That’s our life. We came here and now we live here. If there were any sheep left they wouldn’t give us any. We have grown old. We are old and they wouldn’t give us any sheep. There aren’t any, but if there were they wouldn’t give them to us. We are too old. That’s life.”

The era of the Basque shepherders has ended in Elko County and across the rest of the American West. There are vestiges, however, of the Basque shepherders’ legacy, particularly concerning their labor. The Star Hotel in Elko is a reminder that Basque shepherders needed a place to live when not on the range, eat and drink with other Basques, and build a familiar community. Arborglyphs on aspen trees in the mountains offer clues to the experiences foreign Basque herders and camptenders had of the place and their life in the West. Elko Basques continue to make variations of the traditional Sheepherder’s Bread that is associated with the Basque sheepmen. The National Basque Festival also continues in Elko. Each year, the festival programs remind everybody that the festival “began with a celebration that brought shepherders and cattle ranchers into town for a day of celebration.” While the festival is less about shepherders today, reminders of the Basques’ beginnings in the West can still be found in symbols, stories,
and values at the festival. At the 2014 National Basque Festival, a *bertsolari* performer sang, “The older shepherders are gone, so now it’s up to you what you do with their legacy.”

Since the early twentieth century, Basque shepherders have played a role in shaping the local and regional place identity. The majority of first-generation Basques in Elko had experience and knowledge of the American West sheep industry. The rural landscapes were filled with their stories and memories, as well as their signatures. As firsthand experiences, stories, and eventually some landscape expressions such as the arborglyphs fade, Elko’s association with Basque shepherders will likely change. Future generations may celebrate and remember their Basque shepherding heritage in a different manner, but the hope for many Basques is that future generations remember “all Basque[s] who had crossed an ocean and then a continent to settle in the American West. These were men and women with courage and unbridled determination. They herded the sheep and farmed the fields, waited the tables and tended the bars, made the beds and mopped the floors, kept the language and honored the traditions” (Elko Daily Free Press 2016, 23 January). Beginning in the early twentieth century, Basque shepherders began to shape the place identity of northeastern Nevada in distinct ways. Today, their legacy remains.
Sheep-related activities have shaped communities throughout the American West. Townspeople may celebrate their sheep ranching heritage, such as the residents of Big Timber, Montana. Some immigrants, such as the Basques, initially came to the West as shepherders. Through their distinct traditions, they have shaped their communities and landscapes in unique ways. Another vital aspect of the sheep business is the wool industry. In the past, sheep were valued primarily for their wool. Businessmen and civic leaders viewed woolen mills as a logical step in building wealth and manufacturing centers (Lomax 1948). While the majority of woolen mills were not financially sustainable, the Pendleton Woolen Mills, located in northeastern Oregon, has survived. As a result of the mill’s success, it has shaped the community of Pendleton as well as the larger Pacific Northwest region.

Many actors create and shape place identity. Local residents contribute to place identity through the experiences of their everyday lives. Corporate actors also impose their own notions of place identities upon a locality, such as the case with Pendleton, Oregon and the Pendleton Woolen Mills. Corporations use promotions and advertising materials to reflect their products and services. In the case of Pendleton Woolen Mills, their identity is tied to place, craftsmanship, quality wool, and a western, Native American, and family heritage. As a business, they have successfully branded themselves as a western company. Consumers connect with Pendleton’s outdoor, “Northwest” identity. Their products take on western place names, from cities to physical geographic features and national parks. In addition, Pendleton’s long-standing relationship with
western Native American tribes has resulted in blankets representing the stories, colors, and designs of different groups, such as the Navajo, Umatilla, and Blackfeet. While company headquarters are now in Portland, Oregon, the original mill and store in Pendleton, Oregon continues to operate and make wool blankets. Further, it serves as a tourist destination for many who seek a connection with their own personal “Pendleton story.” From early twentieth century slogans such as “Pendleton is a woolen mill town” to today’s promotion of the mill as a tourist attraction, Pendleton Woolen Mills has helped shape the community of Pendleton since the 1890s. The company, the town, the mill workers, and the local newspaper have all played a role in creating and shaping Pendleton’s place identity as a woolen mill town.

Building an Industrial Center

The story of Pendleton Woolen Mills and the growth of Pendleton into a center of western industry begins with sheep, for it was their wool that initially made a local mill possible. Sheep came to western Oregon before they appeared in the eastern half of the state. In the early 1860s, however, as more land was being consumed to grow wheat in the Willamette Valley, stockmen began to see the land east of the Cascades as a “world of rich grass” (Minto 1902, 230). Beginning in 1862, mining activity in northeastern Oregon also created a market for livestock (Lomax 1941). The eastern part of Oregon provided several attractive features to sheepmen, including the “rich grass,” a burgeoning local market, and infrastructure for shipping products. The Columbia River provided an early shipping corridor for wool from inland Oregon to the larger coastal shipping points.
and markets. Towns along the Columbia River, such as The Dalles and Arlington, were important wool shipping points (Pacific Rural Press 1891, 2 May). After the railroads were built, they provided a means for other towns to ship products to larger markets. Inland towns with railroad access, such as Pendleton (1881), Heppner (1888), and Shaniko (1900), grew in importance as wool shipping points (Figure 5-1).

By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, eastern Oregon was sheep country. In 1890, there were over 1.4 million sheep feeding on the region’s abundant grasses (USBC 1890). Outspoken promoters such as Marcus Whitman and John Minto
viewed the northeastern quadrant of Oregon as exceptional sheep country (Kenny 1963). With men and local newspapers taking on the role of boisterous promoters, the region continued to attract sheepmen. When sheepmen arrived, they found a moderately dry climate, abundant grasses, large areas of open range, and forests and mountain ranges nearby to allow for summer grazing. Sheepmen found that the promoters did not exaggerate the region’s potential.

Sheep became a defining part of daily life across the region. “Everyone talked wool and sheep, feed, water, markets, freight rates and the tariff” (Lomax 1974, 244). With an abundance of sheep in the region, Pendleton’s politicians, businessmen, and sheepmen began to look to the next step in maximizing profits, which included investments in the wool business and the building of a woolen mill. Other cities in the American West during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also had an eye toward creating an industrial empire. Railroads, governments, businessmen, and municipalities all contributed to this era of boosterism. Nearby Spokane, Washington was often advertised as the capital of the “Inland Empire,” as the city emerged as a key railroad and industrial center (Morrissey 1997). Boosters for Fresno, California touted its location as a commercial center for the resources from the San Joaquin Valley, stating that all roads lead to Fresno (Abbott 2008). Further east, Chicago boosters painted their early city as destined to become a great metropolis (Cronon 1991). In *How Cities Won the West*, Carl Abbott (2008) explores the ubiquity of boosterism in western cities as a strategy for imagining and building cities.
Pendleton leaders were proud of their manufacturing and industrial potential (East Oregonian 1892, January 1). The local newspaper frequently advocated bringing in more businesses to help grow the city. They envisioned Pendleton as a manufacturing and industrial hub. The *East Oregonian* used phrases such as “the coming city of the Inland Empire” or “a new period of industrial activity” (1888, 25 July; 1909, 4 January). Boosters, including those writing for the local newspaper, saw Pendleton as an ideal place for a woolen mill because it was the “center of the wool producing section of the country, and has superior railroad facilities and the necessary capital to carry on the enterprise” (East Oregonian 1892, 1 January). Beginning in the late 1880s, the *East Oregonian* was an advocate for the building of a wool cleaning and scouring plant or a woolen manufacturing mill (East Oregonian 1897, February 9).

That dream came true in the early 1890s when a scouring plant was built. A local scouring plant was seen as a considerable benefit to sheepmen. Scouring plants washed the wool to rid the fleeces of dirt and contaminants, making the wool cleaner and lighter in terms of weight. Since railroads charged sheepmen to ship their wool by their weight, lighter fleeces equated to less unnecessary costs to the sheepmen when they shipped their wool to larger markets. Prominent Pendleton residents, particularly members of the Pendleton Commercial Club, financially supported the building of a scouring plant (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005). In 1893, the Pendleton scouring plant was constructed, and in May of 1894, the plant was running and processing hundreds of thousands of pounds of local and regional wool. Known as the Pendleton Wool-Scouring and Packing Company, the facility washed over 2,000,000 pounds of wool after only two and half
months of operation (Lomax 1948). According to local newspapers, “The scouring tubs were kept constantly full as the strings of freight wagons lined up at the unloading platforms to discharge their cumbersome three-ton loads of a dozen to fifteen sacks each” (Lomax 1948, 215). Wool was shipped to Pendleton from much of eastern Oregon and parts of Washington. Pendleton was in the heart of sheep country, and with the scouring plant running, the town became known as a wool center for the surrounding region.

“Pendleton is a Woolen Mill Town”

With the initial success of the scouring plant, talk quickly turned to expanding operations to include a woolen mill. News and editorials printed in the *East Oregonian* reveal the arguments advocates were making. Advocates argued that scouring was a seasonal affair, but a textile mill could be in continuous operation (Friedman 2002). Further they argued, the entire production line could be kept local; the wool was from eastern Oregon, it would be scoured in Pendleton, made into a product in Pendleton, and then shipped directly to stores and buyers as a finished product. Geography played a large role in the promotion of the mill. Advocates cited the resources of the region that included wool, water, and labor (East Oregonian 1892, January 1). Local wool, including quality wool, was plentiful. Water from the Umatilla River would provide power to operate a mill and enough water needed to process the wool. A plentiful labor force experienced with handling wool was also available (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005). Pendleton was not the only city which had a vocal number of woolen mill promoters. “Woolen mill fever” was found in other Oregon communities such as The Dalles, Salem, and Albany, where real estate developers, bankers, merchants, and local governments
saw woolen mills as an efficient and effective way to enhance the local and regional economies (Lomax 1974; Hodas 1975).

In 1896, a woolen mill was built in Pendleton. Similar to the scouring plant’s organization, the woolen mill was incorporated and owned by stockholders. Six individuals, including E.Y. Judd, who was the majority stockholder, and Theron E. Fell, first incorporated the Pendleton Woolen Mills in 1895 (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005). From the beginning, Theron E. Fell, the manager of both the scouring plant and the new woolen mill, focused on blankets for Native Americans (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005; Friedman 2014). Fell marketed the mill’s blankets to local tribes on the Umatilla Reservation where the Umatilla, Cayuse, and Walla Walla tribes lived (Friedman 2014). The first year, the mill also worked with additional buyers elsewhere in the West. For example, Coffin Brothers (Pacific Northwest) and C.N. Cotton (New Mexico), sold or traded Pendleton woolen blankets with other Native American tribes. The Coffin Brothers sold blankets at their stores in Washington and Idaho and worked with tribes such as the Nez Perce (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005). C.N. Cotton traded blankets with the Navajo in Gallup, New Mexico. The mill also sold blankets to three Portland-based firms that included Ben B. Oppenheimer, Olds and King, and Fleischner, Mayer, and Company (Baisinger 1979). Fell wanted to sell blankets to other tribes and traders as well, but felt he needed to know their preferences for colors and designs. He sent out factory representatives to reservations throughout the West so the mill could customize blankets for each tribe as “robes with colors acceptable to the Crows in the North were unsalable to the Navajos in the Southwest (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005, 122).
In 1901, Pendleton Woolen Mills produced a catalog titled *The Story of the Wild Indian’s Overcoat* (Swagerty 2002; Kapoun and Lohrman 2005). It was a small, three-by-five-inch brochure that detailed the process of making Pendleton products, from scouring all locally sourced wool at the Pendleton Wool Scouring Plant to the authenticity of Native American designs used on the robes. According to *Printer’s Ink* (1902, 36), a journal for advertisers, “all students of good advertising will find profit in reading” the booklet. Part of what contributed to its effective advertising, was the marketing of Pendleton Woolen Mills products as authentic. One way the company advertised its authenticity was to claim that “on reservations everywhere, Indians can be found wearing these popular robes” (Pendleton Woolen Mills 1901, 11). The brochure also included photographs that were for sale taken by Lee Moorhouse and Carl Wheeler. These images showed Native Americans wearing Pendleton robes, lending to the authenticity of the products.

Pendleton Woolen Mills maintained a close working relationship with the nearby Umatilla Reservation tribes. While early catalogs, brochures, postcards, and blanket labels at times featured famous Native Americans, such as Chief Joseph and Geronimo, the company routinely had local Native Americans model their Pendleton robes for their printed materials. Major Lee Moorhouse, an Indian Agent for the Umatilla Reservation and a photographer, took thousands of photos of the local tribes between 1888 and 1916, and many of his photographs featured Pendleton Woolen Mills blankets that the company used for advertisements. The *East Oregonian* highlighted one of the photos and Native Americans with the headline, “An Advertised Indian” (1904, 1 March). According to the
paper, Cayuse Chief Paul Showaway’s, photo was sent “into every civilized country on Earth” (East Oregonian 1904, 1 March). Another publicized photo of a Native American from the Umatilla Reservation shows the unidentified man standing next to a Jacquard loom in the mill (Figure 5-2). In addition to cards and other advertisements, labels were attached to some of the Pendleton blankets showing Native Americans wearing Pendleton robes (Figure 5-3). Pendleton Woolen Mills did not only use visual marketing techniques, but they also attempted to appear authentic in their advertising brochures by describing Native American places, traditions, and customs (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005).
Figure 5-2. A Native American from the Umatilla Reservation stands next to a Jacquard loom in a 1900 Pendleton Woolen Mills advertisement (Friedman 2002, 50).
In 1904, thousands of Pendleton robes were sent to traders, agents, and stores around the country, with 1,200 robes sent to a single firm in Gallup, New Mexico (East Oregonian 1904, 9 December; Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005). It was not only Native Americans using the Pendleton products. Other customers, such as Euro-Americans, became enthralled with the notion of the “romantic Indian” portrayed in Pendleton’s advertising (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005). By 1900, the mill was shipping blankets and

Figure 5-3. A cardboard label placed on Pendleton blankets showing Native Americans wearing the company’s blankets (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005, 125).
robes to both western and eastern cities (East Oregonian 1900, 14 July). A few years later, the *East Oregonian* boasted of Pendleton robes and blankets decorating “Japanese bungalows, French boudoirs, Russian cozy corners, Spanish piazzas and thousands of American homes” (1904, February 1).

Pendleton Woolen Mills were known for their Indian robes, but they also used other aspects of place to sell their products. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, Pendleton Woolen Mills, their products, and place were tightly intertwined. Residents prided themselves on the quality of their locally-made goods. Theron E. Fell, manager of the mill during its early years, was quoted as saying, “The goods put out by the Pendleton mills is [sic] absolutely pure Eastern Oregon wool” (East Oregonian 1901, May 31). Local advertisements for Pendleton Woolen Mills products in the *East Oregonian* stated, “The Pendleton Woolen Mills are making Pendleton Famous,” and “all [products are] made from Eastern Oregon Fleece Wool” (East Oregonian 1901, November 29).

Although the original Pendleton Woolen Mills was not in operation long, the company, mostly through their blankets and advertisements, made both the brand and the place well-known.

Despite the mill’s quality products and “fame,” by 1905, the Pendleton Woolen Mills was hurting financially due to “heavy indebtedness” according to the local newspaper (East Oregonian 1905, September 13). Fuel was also a great expense for the mill and was “the greatest drawback to the success of the mill” (East Oregonian 1907, December 6). Between 1905 and 1908, the mill’s future was in question. While some demand for the mill’s products continued, the mill was not managed properly. It was not
running on a regular basis, and between 1905 and 1908, talk turned to the mill closing permanently and moving to a different town. The *East Oregonian* did not want to see the mill leave, and the newspaper played a large role in promoting the woolen mill. One tactic in urging residents to help keep the woolen mill was to persuade them of Pendleton’s identity as “a wool town” (*East Oregonian* 1908, 3 December). They saw the successful operation of the mill as a key part in building and sustaining an “industrial city.” Articles in the paper worked to persuade readers by arguing the mill would provide a payroll, which would in turn help other businesses. *East Oregonian* articles indicated the mill employed an average of 40 people between 1902 and 1905 (1902, 2 May; 1903, 9 July; 1905, 27 February). With the population of Pendleton slightly over 4,400 people in 1900, the mill was viewed as providing a valuable payroll for the community. A successful mill, the newspaper suggested, would also encourage other industries to move to the city, and “within a few years we will see a larger and better Pendleton. Umatilla county [sic] will become a greater county” (*East Oregonian* 1908, 3 December).

As other newspapers and promoters of cities did during this era (Morrissey 1997), the writers of articles personified the city of Pendleton. “She” could not possibly let the woolen mill leave.

Pendleton has received greater advertising from this mill and its products than from any other one industry in the city. Her name has been carried to the ends of the world through this Institution. It has furnished her a good payroll, has purchased her wool, has kept money in circulation. In her channels of trade and has made her name known far and wide. Now will she permit it to be moved away? (*East Oregonian* 1908, 15 July).

By personifying the city, writers hoped to connect with the readers and persuade them to keep their woolen mill.
When the Bishop family from western Oregon became interested in the mill as a result of a Pendleton merchant and state legislator approaching the family, community boosters saw this as the perfect opportunity (Friedman 2002). The Bishops were descendants of the English weaver Thomas Kay and had proved they were business savvy in the West’s textile industry (Baisinger 1979). Negotiations between Pendleton businessmen, civic leaders, and the Bishops began in 1908. The *East Oregonian* followed the progress closely, keeping readers informed of the proceedings. The Bishops were not new to the industry, and they were aware that if the mill was to succeed, certain conditions needed to be met. The Bishops agreed to buy the mill if the town could raise $30,000 in the form of bonds to help initially finance the mill, particularly building a new, more modern mill facility (East Oregonian 1909, 20 February). Additionally, the mill machinery was to be purchased at a stipulated price and “a suitable rate secured on electric power, the mill property to be exempted from a city tax for 20 years, and the mill company allowed to make the necessary sewer connections” (East Oregonian 1908, 21 December).

Throughout the soliciting period, the local newspaper printed updates of the committee’s progress towards the needed $30,000. On February 2, 1909, the *East Oregonian* printed a complete list of bond subscribers and labeled the investors as “town builders.” Due in part to the “continuous newspaper agitation upon the subject,” the promoters of the Pendleton Woolen Mill were successful (East Oregonian 1909, 6 February). In 1909, the Bishops purchased the mill and had it running before the end of the year.
The Bishop family, including Charles Bishop and his three brothers, Clarence, Roy, and Chauncey, bought the mill in 1909 and began running a successful operation. They were “woolen mill men from a woolen mill family” (East Oregonian 1909, January 6). Their grandfather, Thomas Kay, was an English weaver who opened his own woolen mill in 1889 in Salem, Oregon. Clarence and Roy graduated from the Philadelphia Textile School and had worked at other mills in the South and East (Friedman 2014).

From the beginning, the Bishops successfully branded their products. They acquired the “Pendleton Woolen Mill” name and all trademarks used by the former owners (East Oregonian 1909, 12 January). They continued focusing on blankets and robes for Native Americans throughout the West. When the Bishops purchased a weaving mill in Washougal, Washington in 1912, they added clothing to their brand. Even after they expanded and began making apparel, however, they spent considerable time marketing their Indian robes and blankets, particularly prior to World War II (Friedman 2014). In the early twentieth century, the Bishops worked closely with Joseph Rawnsley who had also worked with the previous owners. Rawnsley was a blanket designer and spent time with local Native American groups in northeastern Oregon. Rawnsley’s knowledge of different tribes allowed the company to understand their tastes and preferences and consequently develop designs that were appealing to the different groups.

Another tactic Pendleton Woolen Mills used was to employ exceptional salesman that traveled to the reservations to sell blankets to the traders. Roy Bishop himself took blanket samples throughout the Southwest and sold them to traders who were doing
business with the Navajo (Friedman 2002). One of the most successful salesmen, however, was Major William S. Davidson who sold Pendleton Woolen Mills blankets for 26 years beginning in 1911; prior to that, Davidson sold woolen products for Racine Woolen Mills for 24 years (East Oregonian 1911, 9 August). He was intimately familiar with the West, could communicate in 27 Native American languages, and was keenly aware of different Native American cultures. He was known to outsell all other Pendleton Woolen Mills sales team members, and was a valuable asset for the company (Friedman 2002).

Pendleton Woolen Mills was one of several woolen mills that targeted Native Americans as customers between the 1890s and the early 1940s. Briefly, at that point, production shifted to focusing on war efforts. After World War II, however, Pendleton Woolen Mills was the only mill to continue its manufacturing of Indian blankets. Prior to the war, the other major trade-blanket manufacturers were J. Capps and Sons, Shuler and Benninghofen Woolen Mill Company, and Racine Woolen Mills. In the American West, Pendleton Woolen Mills only competed with Knight Woolen Mills and Oregon City Woolen Mills (Friedman 2002). Through successful marketing techniques and business-savvy owners, Pendleton Woolen Mills quickly became “the giant” after the Bishops took ownership of the mill (M’Closkey 2008, 87; Friedman 2002). Pendleton blankets were viewed as “supreme,” and the Navajo viewed their products as the best (Friedman 2002, 104). In addition to the Navajo, Pendleton Woolen Mills had a loyal and large customer base with other tribes, including the Hopi, Zuni, Nez Percé, Yakima, Umatilla, Cayuse, and Walla Walla (Friedman 2002).
Similar to the prior owners, Pendleton Woolen Mills under the Bishops did not limit their market to Native Americans even though many of the blankets were influenced by Native American designs. The company produced elaborate catalogs that catered to a larger market that included Euro-Americans. The catalogs were designed with a wider, customer-base in mind, but Pendleton Woolen Mills used the nostalgia for the “romantic Indian” to sell their products using photos of Native Americans dressed in Pendleton robes and at times through their product descriptions. Kapoun and Lohrmann (2005) reprinted some of the descriptions used in catalogs from the 1920s and 1930s where Pendleton Woolen Mills describes their products based on Native American stories, traditions, and their lifestyle. The “Teepee pattern” blanket description stated, “Indians buy many of these robes each year…It must remind them of their teepee homes among the green firs, with patches of snow here and there on the bleak, brown mountainside (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005, 128). The “Chief Joseph” blanket was described as representing this “great chief’s bravery and strength – he commanded the respect and admiration of all during peace and war. Truly Indian in design and color” (Kapoun and Lohrmann 2005, 128).

Pendleton Woolen Mills also celebrated and promoted their relationship with the American cowboy. Pendleton’s Round-up Rodeo began in 1910, and in 1913, Pendleton Woolen Mills signed on as an official sponsor, bringing even more notice to the company, particularly to the “cowboy” market (Friedman 2002). Pendleton’s 1928 catalog featured “Bob” Crosby who was awarded the world’s champion all-around
cowboy in 1927. The catalog states he and many other rodeo participants “prefer
‘Pendletons’ to all other Wool Shirts” (Pendleton Woolen Mills 1928, 22).

Since World War II, the company has purposefully reimagined itself to maintain
its viability. Pendleton Woolen Mills’ markets expanded in 1949 when they introduced
women’s clothing. The 49’er jacket was the first piece of clothing designed for women
by Pendleton Woolen Mills (East Oregonian 2009). Throughout the second half of the
twentieth century, Pendleton Woolen Mills continued to grow and become relevant to
“popular culture.” A popular musical group named themselves “The Pendletons” after the
popularly of Pendleton’s plaid shirts favored by surfers. The group later changed their
name to “The Beach Boys” (East Oregonian 2009). A timeline produced for the mill’s
2009 centennial highlights their growth and many of their achievements, such as their
tradition of gifting every U.S. President a Pendleton blanket, their expansion beyond
wool-only clothing, and the opening of Pendleton retail stores throughout the country
(East Oregonian 2009). In the twenty-first century, Pendleton Woolen Mills maintains its
commitment to stay relevant with a wide audience, including Native Americans, older
demographics, and the “hipster class” (Los Angeles Times 2011, 21 August). To reach a
wider audience, the company works with various designers to capture Portland’s
bohemian style, and they also collaborate with other renowned companies, such as Nike,
Levi’s, and Van’s (The Oregonian 2009, 22 December; Los Angeles Times 2011, 21
August). As the company has evolved, Linda Parker, the Corporate Communications
leader at Pendleton Woolen Mills, said they have worked to not “alienate the Pendleton
loyalist,” but also “to attract the customer who is young in attitude” (Seattle Times 1992, 14 October; personal communication, September 17, 2014).

As a result of their success, the Bishop family and therefore Pendleton Woolen Mills impacted the town and the region, and continues to do so. The town has felt their presence with the mill itself and the workers employed. The Bishop family and mill are also heavily involved with other town events, particularly the Pendleton Round-up. The rodeo is now Pendleton’s main attraction and a relationship still exists between the Round-up and Pendleton Woolen Mills with their sponsorships and visible presence at the week-long event.

Outside of the city of Pendleton, the Bishops built a long tradition of working closely with local and regional woolgrowers. During the early twentieth century, sheep were still a considerable part of the region’s agricultural economy. When the mill bought wool from the Cunningham Sheep and Land company in 1912, the *East Oregonian* praised the relationship, writing that the local mill is not only a “benefit from a manufacturing standpoint but also from the standpoint of the woolgrower” (February 29, 1). These reciprocal relationships between the Pendleton Woolen Mills and the regional sheep growers have continued for over one hundred years. In addition to its long connections to the Cunningham ranch, the mill also has a long-standing relationship with the Krebs Sheep Ranch near the Umatilla County border. Both relationships with these large local ranches remain strong today. Glen, the general manager of the Cunningham Sheep Ranch, said, “Both could go other places, and they both realize it. But they have an established relationship, and that’s worth something” (personal communication, August
6, 2014). Dan Gutzman purchases wool for Pendleton, and he echoed Glen’s comment, saying, “It is a relationship with the growers” (personal communication, September 17, 2014). Another reason for their continued, close relationship is the proximity of headquarters to the Cunningham and Krebs operations. Dan said this proximity “makes it easier to work with them on a deeper level” (personal communication, September 17, 2014). They work together to figure out how to get the best quality of wool.

When the Bishop family acquired Pendleton Woolen Mills, they quickly turned it into a successful enterprise. The family bought other mills and in 1919 moved their headquarters to Portland to be closer to their main, larger mills in Washougal, Washington. There is no evidence from the local newspaper that their move was seen as a detriment to the local Pendleton community. Rather, since the company was so successful, and they brought more jobs and “fame” to Pendleton, the local newspaper continued to praise the Bishops and the mill. In 1921, they dedicated an entire front page to the history of the mill, the success of the Bishops, the mill’s payroll, and overall sales figures (East Oregonian 1921, 1 January). Even though the company was no longer headquartered in Pendleton, they were still present in the community. Their relationships with the community and woolgrowers continued to have an impact on the region.

Pendleton’s Landscape

Pendleton’s cultural landscape reinforces the locality’s place identity and its connections to the sheep and the woolen industry. It is filled with “history and significance” and holds stories of the town founding, local industries, and generations of
work (Ryden 1999, 522). Researchers have explored other towns and their landscapes, showing that stories and landscape meanings contribute to the collective memory of the place and play a role in shaping the place identity of communities (Wyckoff 1995; Wheeler 2014). Pendleton’s landscape includes residential neighborhoods, businesses selling and now displaying Pendleton Woolen Mills products, and tourist attractions promoting the community’s heritage. One especially important feature is the surviving Pendleton Woolen Mills building, and it remains an important link to the past.

The Significance of the Pendleton Woolen Mills Building

Geographers have shown how buildings hold meanings and value to communities, as they are places where social memories accumulate (Tuan 1975; Hareven and Langenbach 1981; Arreola 2002; Whelan 2005). They can also be seen as places important to the social interpretation of a place (Hayden 1995; Whelan 2005). When interpreting buildings, Whelan (2005) suggests “it is important to situate them amid the cultural and political context in which they were built” (67). The cultural and political atmosphere in Pendleton was different when the woolen mill was first built, compared to the scene in Pendleton today. It is important, therefore, to look to the past to understand the building and the company’s significance to the community.

The Pendleton Woolen Mills building has been part of the Pendleton landscape since 1909 (Figure 5-4). When the Bishops bought the company in 1909, they immediately built a new mill and used concrete to reduce the risk of fire. They also installed an automated sprinkler system since wool is rich in oil and highly flammable
Brick additions were built in 1941 and 1946, but the original building is still visible and in use (Figure 5-5).

Figure 5-4. Pendleton Woolen Mills built in 1909. Provided courtesy of Pendleton Woolen Mills, Inc. (PWM, 1909b)
Not only did the Bishops construct an up-to-date building, they chose a new location for the mill (Figure 5-6). The 1910 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows the first woolen mill building and scouring plant located downtown at the intersection of Mill Street and Webb Avenue, later renamed SE 6th Street and Emigrant Avenue, respectively. The new mill was built northeast of the original mill’s location, on the outer edge of Pendleton. Its large size made it a visually prominent part of the urban landscape (Figure 5-7). The East Oregonian detailed the new mill’s location, writing that “the location could not be more suitable, both as an advertisement to the city, and for the convenience of the mill and those to be employed therein” (1909, 23 March). The Bishops built the mill next to the railroad tracks, between the Northern Pacific line and the O.R.&N. line, making the transport of goods convenient. The newspaper editors continued their role in shaping the city’s place identity and perceptions of the city as a woolen mill town and manufacturing city by highlighting the mill’s visual prominence. They wrote, “It will be
impossible for persons coming in or going out, to the east or north, to fail to see the building and to recognize that it is the home of a large manufacturing establishment” (1909, 23 March). Another article praised the efforts of the community in bringing the mill back to Pendleton, for they viewed the mill as a vital part of the city and its identity. An *East Oregonian* article stated, “All who have the welfare of Pendleton at heart rejoice at the rebuilding of the mill. It means much to the city” (1909, 24 March). The new woolen mill building symbolized a thriving city and its potential to become an important regional industrial hub.

Figure 5-6. Pendleton Woolen Mills past and present urban signatures. Map by author.
Figure 5-7. The stately Pendleton Woolen Mills. Provided courtesy of Pendleton Woolen Mills, Inc. (PWM, n.d.)

The new mill sat in an open and mostly undeveloped area of town. Houses, flourmills, lumberyards, and warehouses were adjacent to the old mill, with the courthouse and downtown businesses nearby. The new mill, built off of Court Street, was in a much quieter part of town at the time. A year after the mill was built, the 1910 Sanborn Fire Insurance map showed few houses near the mill. The area, however, was not completely empty. The new Pendleton Woolen Mills building joined two other stately buildings located off of Court Street. St. Joseph’s Academy Franciscan Convent, built in 1887, was described as “one of the handsomest edifices in the city” (Parsons and Shiach 1902, 192), and in 1902, St. Anthony’s Hospital was added to the community and the
Court Street landscape (East Oregonian 2015, 14 January). Approximately a quarter of a mile to the north of the mill, Washington Public School was built in 1904 according to the 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. As the town of Pendleton grew, the land surrounding the mill, convent, hospital, and school also began to fill in. Between 1910 and the 1920s, a neighborhood took shape around the mill, dominated by working class housing.

The Pendleton Woolen Mills building remains a visible part of the urban landscape. In 2016, it stands as both a functional and symbolic building. It has been a functional building since it opened in 1909 and serves as “tangible evidence of the past” (Lowenthal 1975). Thousands of employees have worked within its walls playing a role in creating the famous Pendleton woolen blankets. Each of those employees has memories attached to the building. Their memories are tied to the hard work they performed within the building, as well as to the family and friendships that defined their daily lives in the community.

The woolen mill building represents and symbolizes more than the hard work, friendships, and family of those intimately familiar with the building. It has also come to symbolize the town of Pendleton. In Toluca, Illinois, two large slag piles left over from the mining days have become central to that town’s outside image (Robertson 2006). The original Pendleton Woolen Mills building plays a similar role and is part of the image that Pendleton projects to outsiders. Landscape features, whether a slag pile or a building, may come to symbolize a place and contribute to a place identity through the use of iconography. Geographer Kevin Blake (2008, 4) defines iconography as “the collected
pictorial representations or symbols…that convey its symbolic meaning.” The community of Pendleton, through the newspapers, brochures, and more recently, websites, has used the building in its marketing of their place since the early twentieth century. The mill’s iconography has represented different ideas, from progress in the early twentieth century to a local western heritage in the twenty-first century.

When the mill was first built, the newspaper saw the mill building as representing a growing, thriving, modern city. They frequently mentioned the grandeur of the building and its modern facilities (East Oregonian 1909, 23 March; 1909, 15, July; 1909, 1 September). The *East Oregonian* printed a quote from O.P. Hoff, the state labor commissioner, where he said, “The Pendleton woolen mill is one of the most modernly [sic] equipped mills in the country and I know of no other mill where the welfare and comfort of employees will be so well provided for as in the new mill” (1909, 22 September). Photos of the mill were also used in publications and were framed to highlight the building’s stateliness (see Figure 5-7).

As the twentieth century drew to a close, the Pendleton Woolen Mills building no longer represented progress and stateliness, but rather, it was seen as historically significant to the community. The mill and the building itself represented an “attitude of respect for the past” (Freidberg 1987, 17). Local history books use historic images of the building, showing its long, continuous connection to the past (East Oregonian Publishing Co. 1998; Gibson 2014). The Chamber of Commerce still uses the building in marketing the town. They advertise the mill to tourists by using images of the building on townscape signage, brochures, and websites (such as *Travel Pendleton’s* blog). The mill
has a long history in the Pendleton community. It took the community to secure enough money to help finance the building, and that story is interwoven into the mill’s narrative. One of the iconic images of the building is a photo that was taken of the bondholders wearing Pendleton blankets in the front of the building (Figure 5-8). The image has been used by the town and reprinted in local and national history books, which helps to further cement the building and the community’s involvement with the mill. Some outsiders have suggested that the woolen mill and not the Round-up Rodeo best symbolizes the community. The mill represents “an attitude of respect for the past, for the old-fashioned as well as simply for the old…and more than even the rowdiest rodeo show, brands them [Pendleton and the company] as part of the ‘true West’” (Freidberg 1987, 17).
Pendleton Woolen Mills also uses the image of the building as part of their advertising campaigns (Figure 5-9). The Pendleton mill is much smaller than the company’s other current mill in Washougal, Washington. However, it is the original and first mill built by the Bishops as owners of Pendleton Woolen Mills. Clarence Morton Bishop, Jr. the former president of Pendleton Woolen Mills, saw symbolic value in the original mill. He said, “The ‘spirit’ of the Pendleton area, of the Indians and the ranchers and the natural landscape, has influenced the design of Pendleton products, and this spirit
the company is reluctant to abandon.” He continued, saying, the mill has a “subjective value” (Freidberg 1987, 17).

Figure 5-9. The original mill used in the company's advertising imagery (Pendleton-USA).

The inside of the Pendleton mill also shapes the narrative of both the company and the town. Photos and other décor found in the interior impact visitors and workers alike. Former employees often remarked during conversations and interviews about the historic photos decorating the walls. Employees and visitors enter through different doors. Employees enter a door that takes them straight to the working mill, where historic and contemporary photos hang from the walls. Visitors and the public enter through a series of salesrooms. Upon entering the first salesroom, a visitor sees Pendleton clothing products. Another large salesroom nearby contains piles of the famous Pendleton woolen blankets (Figure 5-10). Hanging on the wall are historic photos and an enlarged image of
all of the first bondholders who made possible the opening of the new Pendleton Woolen Mills in 1909 (Figure 5-11). Attached to the blanket room is another small room called the “Heritage Collection” (Figure 5-12). Rather than products for consumers to buy, the room is dedicated to the family and western heritage of Pendleton Woolen Mills. The room contains items from the Bishop family, such as the desk of Clarence Mort Bishop, Jr.. Historic photos of the Bishops partaking in rodeo events at the Pendleton Round-up also decorate the walls and display cases. Much of the rest of the museum room is dedicated to the relationship between the Bishops, the Pendleton Woolen Mills, and Native Americans. Photos of Native American groups and individuals, as well as photos of the Bishops with Native Americans, decorate the room. Native American artifacts and out-of-issue, historic blankets are also displayed in the “Heritage Collection.”

Figure 5-10. The mill store's blanket room. Photo by author, August 12, 2014.
Figure 5-11. Photos of the original bond holders decorate the walls of the Pendleton Woolen Mills store. Photo by author, August 12, 2014.
Figure 5-12. The Heritage Collection at the Pendleton Woolen Mills store. Photo by author, August 12, 2014.
Mill tours allow visitors an “insider’s look” into other parts of the building. Tours begin in the blanket salesroom where tourists and shoppers obtain headsets so tour guides can talk into a microphone, as the mill is loud with the constant humming of machines. Tours proceed into the working mill where visitors see bins of vividly colored dyed yarn that is eventually woven into Pendleton blankets (Figure 5-13). From there, visitors enter the weaving room where the sounds of the mill drown out any other noise. Before they receive a tour of the weaving room, however, they are guided upstairs where the tour continues in the carding room. Visitors watch as wool is brushed and steamed, giving it a softer feel and preparing it to be turned into long, tight strands of yarn capable of being woven into clothing and textiles. From the carding room, the tour guide proceeds back downstairs to the weaving room. Tourists watch weavers work on automated looms and create bold, bright blankets one row at a time (Figure 5-14). Simpler patterns, such as stripes and plaids, are woven using dobby looms, while the more complex patterns are woven on the Jacquard looms. One former Pendleton weaver, Patricia Heathman, remembers tourists watching her as she worked on a Jacquard loom. “When you worked there, it was really hard when people came through there standing right there at the end of the loom. Those people didn’t realize that a shuttle could go off or hit the metal thing and at least scare them” (personal communication, February 1, 2017). A loom is part of the mill’s interior landscape, and workers were most aware of the dangers that could happen. Tour guides do warn people to keep their distance for their own safety’s sake as well as for consideration of the workers.
Figure 5-13. Visitors see the vivid colors of dyed yarn during a mill store. Photo by author, May 12, 2014.

Figure 5-14. The mill tour includes an inside look at how blankets are made on the looms. Photo by author, August 12, 2014.
When blankets are woven, they are not initially cut into blankets. Rather, weavers, with their looms, create a continuous roll of fabric that is then sent to the finishing room where a worker meticulously inspects the large roll for any flaws or threads that can be pulled (Figure 5-15). The blankets are not cut at the Pendleton mill, but are instead sent to the Washougal mill in Washington to be washed, dried, napped, and sheared before they are labeled, packaged, and sold to the public. The mill tour concludes in the Heritage room where visitors are encouraged to take their time exploring the Bishop family history and the company’s larger western legacy. Those on the tour are also encouraged to browse the salesroom. During the tours I participated in, each time people entered the salesroom, at least one person remarked on a new appreciation for the blankets.

Figure 5-15. Rolls of blankets before they are sent to the finishing room and to the Washougal mill to be cut. Photo by author, August 12, 2014.
Outside of the mill, the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce recognizes the historical significance of the woolen mill and its historic building. Their websites advertise the mill and its tours as attractions, as do their brochures. In their advertisements, it is not uncommon for them to feature a historic image of the woolen mill. The Chamber also decided to make the mill even more visible in the downtown area as part of their goal to enhance the city’s brand (Pendleton Development Commission 2010). They added a series of “way finding signage” geared towards educating tourists about the history of the mill. The town has marketed their history and heritage by putting up signs in the downtown area to help guide tourists to different attractions, one of which is the Pendleton Woolen Mills. According to the proposal for the signage, the purpose of the signs is to “enhance the existing appeal of the Western style architecture and ambiance of Pendleton, which is best known for its annual rodeo, the Pendleton Round-up, and the home of the Pendleton Woolen Mills, manufacturers of Pendleton Wool blankets and apparel” (Pendleton Chamber of Commerce 2010, 2). Beginning in 2010, the signs were placed around the downtown area (Figure 5-16). Accompanying the signs are historical photos and vignettes that inform readers of part of the history of an event or attraction.
Figure 5-16. Wayfinding signage placed around downtown Pendleton directing visitors to the woolen mill and giving them a brief history of the mill. Photo by author, May 11, 2015.

While every town has multiple images representing and shaping its place identity, Pendleton’s mill building retains its iconic character. The community has celebrated the building in various ways. Even before it was first built, the local newspaper lavishly admired its potential, writing, “…Pendleton is to be given one of the best buildings of the kind in the northwest.” The article continued, “The structure will not only be sightly and indicative of substantiality but will also be first class in every respect” (East Oregonian 1909, 24 March). After it was built, the paper continued to admire the structure as “modern and up-to-date throughout” (East Oregonian 1909, 1 September). The mill was
seen as a functional building that could contribute to the vision of an industrial city. In the twenty-first century, the mill is still a functional building, providing residents with a payroll and churning out quality woolen products. The community, however, also promotes the mill as a tourist attraction and celebrates the western heritage of the mill. With signage on the streets, the Chamber hopes to encourage tourists and visitors to make a trip to the mill. The functional and iconic aspects of the mill both play a role in shaping people’s perceptions of the community.

Pendleton Woolen Mills and the Nearby Urban Landscape

The mill itself is an iconic image for the city of Pendleton. The company has also indirectly shaped the landscape of the larger community in various ways. Mill employees have shaped neighborhoods. Pendleton products with their distinct and identifying patterns have graced different storefront windows in the past. Monuments hint at the legacy of Pendleton Woolen Mills in the community. The indirect landscape signatures may at times be subtle and ephemeral, but they are nonetheless indicators of the ways the mill and the woolen industry have shaped the community.

When the Bishops built a new woolen mill in 1909, the structure was relatively isolated. In 1910, between Court Street and the Umatilla River, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps shows the two streets were devoid of buildings. The 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows houses, apartments, and state offices occupied the space. Washington School, located at the intersection of Lewis (SE Byers Avenue) and River Street, expanded. Surrounding the mill, other establishments and dwellings, such as a visitors parking lot,
houses, and public buildings were added to the scene by 1922. Several of the houses that were built between 1910 and 1922 near the mill became home to mill workers.

In 1920, Pendleton Woolen Mills employed an average of 55 people at the Pendleton mill (East Oregonian 1921, 1 January). The town’s population in 1920 was 6,837 (Census 1920). Although the percentage of employees was rather small compared to the entire town, based on the prevalence of newspaper articles concerning the mill, it was a central part of the community and it provided a sizeable and dependable payroll.

Some mill employees lived in the same neighborhoods. While it was not uncommon for mining companies to create company towns and company housing for employees (Robertson 2006), there is no known company involvement in the creation of Pendleton Woolen Mills employee housing. Employees simply saw advantages to living near where they worked.

The 1925-1926 Polk Directory lists mill employees and addresses. By mapping employees who listed their home address rather than the mill’s address, patterns to the neighborhoods where employees lived appear (Figure 5-17). Many times, employees located near the mill and within walking distance. According to the 1925-1926 Polk Directory, the largest number of mill employees (who listed their addresses) lived in an area within one mile of the mill, which made walking to the mill for work likely. A few blocks west of the mill, Stonewall Jackson (SE 9th St), SE Court Ave, and Lee streets were common residences for workers. The Polk Directories shows that some mill employees lived right next door to one another, while other non-family members even roomed together. In 2016, some of the houses still exist, while others have been torn
down. It is more common to find the old houses demolished closer to the mill as the area’s landscape now consists of newer and wider roads to handle the increased traffic, businesses, parking lots, storage areas, and newer homes built after 1922.

Figure 5-17. Residential patterns of Pendleton Woolen Mills employees, 1925-1926. Map by author (R.L. Polk & Co. 1928-1929).

Pendleton Woolen Mills has also impacted the town’s local retailing landscape. In the past, multiple local stores carried and sold Pendleton products. In 1909 when the first “Pendleton Indian Robes” were made at the Bishops’ mill, multiple stores in Pendleton sold the mill’s products. The East Oregonian wrote “no particular business house will have the exclusive sale of the Pendleton robes, the robes being sold by Bishop Brothers to
all dealers desiring them” (1909, 25 September). Kapoun and Lohrmann (2005) suggest that early on in the company’s history Pendleton Woolen Mills’ close relationship with Hamley Company, a local western retail store in Pendleton that is still in existence, helped them market their Indian blankets to the American cowboy. As time went on, multiple local suppliers continued to sell products made at their local mill. Pendleton Woolen Mills advertisements in the *East Oregonian* listed the local suppliers. In 1921, ten stores locally sold Pendleton Woolen Mills products (East Oregonian 1921, 17 December).

In 2017, the only seller of Pendleton Woolen Mills products was the salesroom floor at the mill. Business owners in town said they could not sell the products because of trademarks. The move to a specialized and more regulated retail division within the company began in the 1980s. According to their website, Pendleton Woolen Mills saw company and privately-owned specialty stores as a better way to offer consumers a more complete selection of Pendleton products all in one location instead of a store offering only a few men’s shirts or only wool blankets (Pendleton Woolen Mills Blog, “About”). However, Pendleton products are still sold in other boutiques and department stores across the country. Regulating their products changed the landscape of the town of Pendleton. By limiting where products can be sold, storefront windows lack the patterns of Pendleton products. Pedestrians do not see signs in stores advertising, “Pendleton Woolen Mills products sold here!” or see stores, such as the local J.C. Penney advertising in the newspaper that they carry Pendleton robes and blankets (East Oregonian 1919, 20 September). Rather, residents and tourists must visit the mill to find Pendleton Woolen
Mills products. With nowhere else to buy their products in the town of Pendleton, the company encourages people to visit the company’s original mill. As a result, visitors to the salesroom and mill learn about the history of the mill with the photos decorating the walls and in the Heritage Collection Museum. By visiting the mill, tourists are also more likely to partake in a mill tour, where Pendleton Woolen Mills can promote the company’s craftsmanship and heritage. As evidenced by interviews with tourists at the mill and in online reviews of the store, the tours create a deeper appreciation for Pendleton products, which the company hopes ultimately leads to more local sales and lifelong customers (Trip Advisor; Yelp).

The heritage of Pendleton Woolen Mills in the community of Pendleton can also be seen in Centennial Park. Monuments and public art have the ability to represent and shape place identity by capturing and connecting to the region’s cultural heritage (Smith, J. 2002). Much of Pendleton’s public art is dedicated to the cowboy and rodeo heritage. Sheep and wool, however, were a considerable part of the community. One public art display where the legacy of Pendleton Woolen Mills can be seen is in Centennial Park located in downtown Pendleton. The park, with a sculpture and fountain as its centerpieces, was created to commemorate Pendleton’s first one hundred years (East Oregonian 1981, 2 September). The sculpture was unveiled in 1982 and received wide community support with private donations used to fund the sculpture (East Oregonian 1982, 11 September; 1985, 9 January). An abstract sculpture, the mobius strip represents and honors the city’s establishment and all who were involved. Surrounding the base of the sculpture are eleven bronze plates representing life in Pendleton (Figure 5-18). Two
of the plaques are tied directly to Pendleton’s wool industry. One is of a ram, the city of Pendleton’s seal. The other is a casting of one of Pendleton Woolen Mills’ famous blue labels (Figure 5-19). While private donations funded the sculpture, the public had little voice in the design of the sculpture. When it was unveiled in 1982, some Pendleton residents were critical of the design, saying, “It should have been something Western” (East Oregonian 1982, 11 September). When the plaques surrounding the sculpture were installed later in 1985, locals commented that they added considerably to the monument, noting, “this will help them (the detractors) accept the whole thing” (East Oregonian 1985, 19 June). Residents viewed the plaques as concrete and appropriate symbols of Pendleton’s past, including sheep, cattle, and wheat (East Oregonian 1985, 1 June).
Figure 5-18. Plaques, including a Ram, at the base of the Centennial Park monument depict life in early Pendleton. Photo by author, May 11, 2015.
Figure 5-19. An image of the Pendleton Woolen Mills blue label decorates another side of the monument's base. Photo by author, May 11, 2015.

The park with its monument and plaques is not a major tourist destination. Locals and tourists alike mostly use the park during town gatherings, such as festivals and the farmers’ market, as well as for a place to eat lunch. Similar to what Hareven and Langenbach (1981) found in their research of registered national landmarks, the monument at Centennial Park informs visitors and reminds locals of the town’s past, but seldom does it genuinely move them. Dolores Hayden (1995, 67-68) wrote, “The older definition of public art is art that is accessible to the public because it is permanently sited in public places” rather than in art galleries, museums, or private homes and offices. By that definition, the monument with its historical plaques at Centennial Park can be seen as
public art. Hayden argues, however, that in order for public art to enhance the social meaning of a place or contribute to a sense of place, community support and solid historical research are needed. The Pendleton community did support the building of the park and monument, as they wanted to have a space dedicated to their town’s foundation and its history. Other than those on the Pendleton Centennial Committee, the general public had little say in what sculpture was chosen for the park. For this reason, the sculpture itself rarely enhances the sense of place. The bronze plaques surrounding the monument, however, do add a historical component to the park and serve to connect residents with the region’s past. Based on published and personal interviews, the designs make the entire monument more “striking” and the past more concrete (East Oregonian 1982, 11 September; 1985, 1 June). In 2011, the Pendleton Downtown Plan, a published vision for the community, indicated community desires to improve Centennial Park (City of Pendleton 2011). Suggested improvements included encouraging more active use, adding more seating options, and the inclusion of more temporary and permanent public art. In the future, the community may participate more in choosing the types of public art displayed at the park. Some voices may indicate a desire to include more works of art celebrating aspects of the wool industry, which would contribute to a stronger place identity associated with Pendleton Woolen Mills, sheep, and the legacy of wool in the community.

Community: Agents in the Process of Place Making

Place making is a result of a combination of forces and characters. In Pendleton,
there are several agents worth exploring in the process of making Pendleton a distinct place and contributing to its contemporary place identity. Pendleton Woolen Mills has participated in the process of place making in Pendleton since its founding, both before and after the Bishop family became the owners. The mill workers are essential to keep the mill operating, and on a more personal level, their memories have contributed to the character of the town. The Chamber of Commerce heavily promotes Pendleton Woolen Mills as a part of the community that makes them unique. Lastly, the local newspaper, the *East Oregonian*, has played a vital role in the process of place making in Pendleton since the late nineteenth century.

For many locals, Pendleton, Oregon is a rodeo town, well-known for the Pendleton Round-up. Other locals, as well as outsiders, are also well-aware of Pendleton Woolen Mills and its long history in the community. As a result of the efforts by the company, community, workers, and local newspaper, Pendleton, Oregon is not known just as a “Round-up town,” but many, especially outsiders, view Pendleton as the original home of Pendleton Woolen Mills products. To understand how Pendleton has been shaped and the widely held perceptions of the place and the company, I formally and informally interviewed a variety of residents that included Chamber of Commerce employees, local business men and women, Cunningham Sheep Company employees, tourists visiting the mill, Pendleton Woolen Mills employees at various levels of the company, and historical society volunteers. Additionally, I conducted a content assessment of relevant online and social media sources that offered insights into the role of sheep, wool, and the woolen mill in marketing Pendleton’s contemporary place
identity.

The Pendleton Woolen Mills Company

The Bishop family took ownership of the Pendleton Woolen Mills in 1909. Since that time, they have helped shape the place identity of Pendleton and the greater Pacific Northwest region. Additionally, Pendleton Woolen Mills has used their cultural and physical setting to shape their company identity. Through their historical narratives, marketing campaigns, catalogs, and products, they continue to incorporate “place” into their company narratives and marketing strategies. Pendleton Woolen Mills is not unique in terms of using place as a means to connect with the public. For example, the trend to use place in marketing has surged since the late twentieth century particularly among craft breweries and food companies (Schnell 2013; Fletchall 2016; Quintana 2016). Wineries also use place in their branding. Further, they have the advantage of an inherent attachment to place with terroir that they employ in their marketing (Williams 2001; Fletchall 2016). Using place in branding and marketing is part of a recent movement known as the neolocal movement. James Shortridge (1996, 10) used the term “neolocal” to describe the “deliberate seeking out of regional lore and local attachment by residents (new and old) as a delayed reaction to the destruction in modern America of traditional bonds to community and family.” He continues by suggesting people are seeking to “forge better geographical identities.” While some businesses may have turned toward the neolocal marketing strategies more recently, Pendleton Woolen Mills embraced the idea of heritage and locally made goods early on in their company history. Since 1909, Pendleton Woolen Mills has used aspects of place and neolocalism to brand themselves
as a western heritage company and brand their products as not only western, but also locally made and authentic.

Traditions, heritage, place, and craftsmanship are central to Pendleton Woolen Mills marketing and branding. American “heritage brands” have risen in popularity in the twenty-first century. Joseph Benson (2004), a branding expert, observes that heritage brands are those that have a compelling and memorable story. At the core of the company narrative, or branding story, is a narrative of a traditional way of life that appeals to present and future generations. The heart of the brand’s story is one of inheritance, shared experiences, and a common, relatable history (Benson 2004). Aaker (1996) also notes that heritage brands portray a story with friendly, familiar, wholesome, and authentic characteristics. Pendleton Woolen Mills is considered a heritage brand by the media and the company themselves. In an interview with Linda Parker, the Corporate Communications leader at Pendleton Woolen Mills, she said people started calling them an American heritage brand before the company did, which she believes shows the authenticity of the brand (personal communication, September 17, 2014). On the company website, in company brochures, and in published interviews with company administrators, the company emphasizes the generational aspect of the company and its identity as an American heritage brand and its authenticity.

While the company brands itself as an “American heritage” brand, they also use their products to brand themselves. They employ ideas of heritage, traditions, and place when marketing and branding their products, particularly their blankets. The blankets Pendleton Woolen Mills produces are works of art. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1975, 161)
suggests, “art provides an image of feeling.” Art enables people to see a particular past. Many of the blankets are ways of illustrating and representing a place or a heritage. Using art to represent a place or heritage is not new among companies. Geographers have shown that art on the labels of beer and wine illustrate places and are used to connect with consumers and shape their perceptions of both product and place (Banks et al. 2007; Schnell 2013; Fletchall 2016; Quintana 2016). In both artistic designs and the stories or descriptions attached to the blanket, Pendleton aims to connect consumers to a particular heritage and place.

In 2017, the company promotes its “six generations of family ownership” (Pendleton-USA). When the Bishop family acquired Pendleton Woolen Mills in 1909, supporters, particularly the local newspaper, emphasized the family’s background in textiles. When promoting the woolen mill, the *East Oregonian* printed a plea to its readers in support of the Bishop family acquiring the mill, writing, “The Bishop brothers…were woolen mill men from a woolen mill family. Not only have the Bishop brothers been connected with the woolen mill business all their lives, but their father and their grandfather also engaged in the business” (1909, 6 January). Pendleton Woolen Mills brochures from the 1950s briefly mention the connection with Thomas Kay that indicates the long family history with the industry (PPL, n.d.). The company, however, did not emphasize explicitly these historical connections to the wool industry in its marketing and advertisements until more recently. The emphasis on their “generations of family ownership” was not a central marketing or promotional campaign until later in the twentieth century when it began to appear in media articles and interviews as well as in
online content such as the company website and sites associated with and run by the company, including social media content, blogs, and promotional videos. In articles about Pendleton Woolen Mills and published interviews with the Bishop family, it is frequently mentioned that Pendleton Woolen Mills is a “sixth-generation family business” (Furniss 2009, 11). Additionally, the generational aspect of the company can be found in one of the company’s blankets. The “Journey West” blanket highlights the company’s multigenerational and longstanding role in the western textile industry. The description on the blanket states,

This intricate design celebrates the pioneering spirit of our founder, weaver Thomas L. Kay, who journeyed from England to America and arrived in Oregon in 1863. It is a tribute to the generations of weavers that have continued his legacy of quality and excellence. The original blanket was discovered recently in a 19th-century European mill and included the designer’s notes and calculations, handwritten neatly along the sides. Our modern Pendleton designers viewed this historic work of art with reverence and used it as inspiration for our Journey West jacquard design (Pendleton-USA).

By highlighting the long-standing family ownership of the company, Pendleton Woolen Mills hopes to connect with current and potential consumers who value an “American heritage.”

In addition to marketing its family heritage, the company has used additional themes to brand itself. A Pendleton Woolen Mills promotional image from 1962 captures the themes of heritage, place, wool, and craftsmanship (Figure 5-20). The first two themes, a western lifestyle and western heritage along with place, have been consistent marketing themes for Pendleton Woolen Mills since 1909. Heritage is a part of a place (Baker 2003), and Pendleton Woolen Mills has depicted heritage through slogans, the
products themselves, product descriptions, artwork in catalogs and promotional materials, and in twenty-first century online efforts. The original Pendleton Woolen Mills created illustrated catalogs with stories attached to each item, and this tradition of attaching a description with a narrative remains today. Blanket descriptions aim to connect consumers with a heritage, whether it is a Native American heritage, a Pendleton Woolen Mills heritage, or a generalized western heritage. The Native American inspired blankets represent some aspect of a particular tribe’s traditions and beliefs or multiple tribes’ traditions. For example, the “Thunder and Earthquake” blanket symbolizes the story of the first people, the Yurok, in northern California along the Klamath River (Pendleton-USA). The “Crossroads” blanket aims to connect with multiple tribes with a description of, “Brilliant red stripes and geometric crosses reference the four directions held sacred by many tribes: North is the mind, south is spirit, east is the body and west is the heart. Balancing the four leads to harmony at the place where crossroads meet” (Pendleton-USA). Symbolizing Native American heritage and traditions on blankets originally made Pendleton Woolen Mills famous, and the company continues to create designs that are appealing to Native Americans and that can be used for ceremonial purposes. For the past 25 years, Pendleton Woolen Mills has created a “Legendary” blanket series based on Native American beliefs and traditions (Pendleton-USA). The blankets and stories are also aimed at non-Natives who simply find the designs aesthetically pleasing or are enchanted, intrigued, or knowledgeable about Native American history in the West.
Figure 5-20. A 1962 advertisement showing the themes of place, wool, craftsmanship and Native American heritage. Provided courtesy of Pendleton Woolen Mills, Inc. (PWM, 1962)
Another common heritage-based theme with Pendleton products focuses on a broader identity with the American West. Some of the blankets, such as the “Super Chief” and “Route 66” blankets, use both illustration and story to depict the past. The “Super Chief” blanket celebrates the role of the railroad in bringing people, particularly celebrities, out West from the 1930s to 1960s (Figure 5-21). The “Route 66” blanket celebrates the historical significance of the famous highway (Figure 5-22). The design and the description instill a sense of nostalgia in consumers as they recall the quirky tourist attractions along the route. The simple “camp blankets” are not illustrated weavings, but rather simple lines. Their stories, however, are an example of Pendleton Woolen mills using a western heritage and place to sell a product. The “Yakima” blanket is similar to the blankets “early shepherds used to brave the elements of the Pacific Northwest—right where our rugged wool versions are still woven today” (Pendleton-USA). The “Hemrich Stripe” blanket is marketed for those with cowboy nostalgia as the description says the blanket is modeled after the ones “cowboys made camp with at the end of a long day on the range” (Pendleton-USA). The American West is filled with myths and nostalgia, from the Route 66 road trip nostalgia (Caton and Santos 2007) to the romantic cowboy (Starrs 1998). Artists and novelists are not the only ones who sometimes perpetuate a sense of nostalgia (Etulain 1996). Companies, including Pendleton, also play a role by using “nostalgia advertising and branding” as a successful marketing strategy (Liebrenz-Himes et al. 2007, 141).
Figure 5-21. A Pendleton blanket capturing the theme of the American West (Pendleton-USA).
Pendleton’s woolen blankets represent different aspects of the West. It may be a Native American inspired design or western nostalgia. Other blankets symbolize the colors and landscape scenes of the West, such as the “Cedar Mountain” blanket that is described as “Grand Canyon's brilliant sunsets, baked clay and rushing waters are evoked by this earthy design” (Pendleton-USA). The Southwest has other blankets representing
its colors, landscapes, and heritage. The earthy “Rio Canyon” blanket is the company’s nod to the “magical beauty and the subtle striations of color revealed by water moving through stone” (Pendleton-USA). The Great Plains are not forgotten in Pendleton’s West. They are represented with the “Topeka Plains” blanket described as “Sinuous lines and golden hues evoke the waving grasslands of the Great Plains, which once supported vast herds of bison and the nomadic tribes that hunted them” (Pendleton-USA). The landscape descriptions attached to the blankets evoke images of each place from both the past and the present. The images partly serve to enhance the public’s perception of Pendleton Woolen Mills as a western heritage company with a western identity.

Mary Hufford (1987, 22) suggested, “places and their names are sources of identity.” Although she was writing of place names on the landscape, utilizing place names in products also helps define identities. Pendleton Woolen Mills utilizes regional place names in many of their products, which helps them brand themselves with a western identity. They name their blankets after places, such as “Topeka Plains” and “Rio Canyon.” Part of the identity of the American West is also connected to the National Parks, and Pendleton Woolen Mills Company began a “National Park” blanket series early in the company’s history.

Continuity in marketing place and heritage can be found in the “National Park” blanket series. The series began in 1916, and in 2016, Pendleton Woolen Mills embarked on a social media campaign using Instagram as a platform. Pendleton Woolen Mills debuted their first “National Park” blanket in 1916 after Hill commissioned the company to create a blanket for the lodges at the newly created Glacier National Park in 1910 (The
Oregonian 2016, 23 July). Other park blankets soon followed, and in 2017, ten national parks are part of the collection: Glacier, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Badlands, Crater Lake, Rainier, Yosemite, Rocky Mountain, Acadia, and Great Smoky Mountains. From the beginning, Pendleton used the landscapes and place to describe the patterns on the blankets. A 1928 catalog described the Grand Canyon blanket’s pattern as evoking “the awe-inspiring multi-colored walls of the Grand Canyon” and the Rainier Park blanket receiving its patterns and colors from “the carpet of wild flowers adorning Paradise Valley” (Pendleton Woolen Mills 1928, 7).

The National Parks Collection received a resurgence in popularity when the National Park Service celebrated its centennial in 2016. Prior to the centennial year, Pendleton Woolen Mills sent out a call on the social media platform Instagram asking photographers to take Pendleton blankets “home to their parks” and document it with the hashtag “pendle10park” (Pendleton Woolen Mills 2016). The campaign brought attention not only to the National Parks and Pendleton blankets, but also to the long-standing legacy of Pendleton Woolen Mills in the American West. Other companies, such as Coca-Cola, have embarked on similar social media campaigns asking fans to post photos of them using Coca-Cola products in their daily lives. Technology researchers suggest that companies using social media in the ways that Pendleton Woolen Mills and Coca-Cola have are beneficial and useful ways for companies to both influence and understand consumer attitudes and beliefs about a product and brand (Weinberg and Pehlivan 2011). Engaging in social media marketing also builds relationships between consumers and organizations (Weinberg and Pehlivan 2011; Laroche et al. 2013).
In addition to the blankets and their descriptions, advertisements have focused on the themes of a western and Native American heritage and place. Early advertisements and catalogs for Pendleton blankets featured Native Americans and portrayed messages of an authentic western heritage. Native Americans were featured in various ways, including wrapped in Pendleton blankets or riding horses (Figure 5-23; Figure 5-24). In 1924, Pendleton Woolen Mills expanded its production to include clothing and produced its first shirt, later coined the Umatilla, which is a tribute to the Umatilla wool that was historically used to make the shirt (East Oregonian 2009, 5 August). Advertisements from the 1940s and 1950s for the wool shirt are advertised as shirts for “outdoors men” and show men engaging in outdoor activities such as chopping wood and fishing. A 1966 catalog advertises Pendleton products, particularly the blankets, as “reflecting the Pendleton touch, a proud part of the hospitable western tradition” (Pendleton Woolen Mills 1966). While Pendleton Woolen Mills continues to utilize conventional marketing and advertising, such as in magazines and brochures, they also use social media and a Pendleton Woolen Mills blog to advertise their company, its heritage, and their products. Their online efforts also focus on the themes of place and heritage, and by using online social platforms, Pendleton Woolen Mills enhances not only brand loyalty, but brand trust (Laroche et al. 2013).
Figure 5-23. An advertisement from 1915 showing Native Americans wrapped in Pendleton blankets (Friedman 2014, 149).
The high quality of Pendleton wool has been a third marketing theme for the company. The Pendleton woolen mill site was initially chosen in part because of its proximity to an abundance of wool. Pendleton Woolen Mills has had several variations of “blue labels.” Their first blue label was used until 1915 and stated, “Guaranteed to be a Pendleton from Pendleton, Oregon, Pure Fleece Wool” (Friedman 2002, 267). After 1915, the blue labels did not mention wool on the actual tag for several years, but advertisements and blanket boxes continued to emphasize Pendleton products as being made with “Virgin fleece wool” (Friedman 2002, 132). Advertisements also emphasized
the quality wool of Pendleton products. “PURE FLEECE WOOL” was printed on
advertisements along with a photo of Pendleton during wool hauling season with a
caption detailing the local process (Figure 5-25). Images in catalogs also highlighted the
theme of locally sourced wool, such as the cover of Pendleton Woolen Mills’ 1936
catalog (Figure 5-26).
Figure 5-25. The high quality of wool has been an enduring marketing theme for Pendleton Woolen Mills as seen in this advertisement (East Oregonian 1912, 27 September).
Figure 5-26. Locally sourced wool is highlighted in this 1936 Pendleton Woolen Mills catalog cover. Provided courtesy of Pendleton Woolen Mills, Inc. (PWM, 1936)
Part of the wool story is where the wool originated. Pendleton Woolen Mills used advertisements and posters to highlight eastern Oregon as the home to the company as well as connect the blankets to the local and regional sheep where the wool came from to make the blankets. One illustration for a 1924 Blackfoot Indian Robe shows a Native American wrapped in a Pendleton blanket with an Oregon scene in the background that consists of Mount Hood, fir trees, a river, a Native American encampment, and grazing sheep. The slogan is “Woven Where the Wool is Grown” (Figure 5-27). Pendleton used the historic illustration to create a blanket. Their description on the blanket states,

The images underline Pendleton’s Northwest home and commemorate our mill in Pendleton, Oregon. Iconic images—Mount Hood, towering fir trees, a Native American encampment, a grazing flock and a blanket-wrapped chief—capture the early days of Pendleton Woolen Mills. We still have relationships with the wool growers in Eastern Oregon, although Pendleton blankets today use wool that is sourced from throughout the world (Pendleton-USA).
During the 1950s when synthetic fibers were quickly being incorporated into clothing, Pendleton Woolen Mills continued to base its products on 100% virgin wool fabrics. C.M. Bishop, the president at the time, wrote a letter to customers and stated, “Only nature can produce the perfect fabric - wool” (Washington Times 1953, 20 February). Eventually the company would incorporate more synthetic fibers in some of its clothing lines, but the company continued to highlight the quality of the wool used for
many of its products, particularly their blankets and wool shirts. One way they highlight the quality of their wool is again through their famous blue label. The most recent blue label on woolen products states, “100% Virgin Fleece Wool.”

Most Pendleton Woolen Mills consumers are distantly removed from wool’s source. The company, however, continues to highlight the value of wool and where they receive it as they feel their customers still want to know. Charles Bishop said, “Consumers, and particularly younger consumers, are interested in sustainable products; they want to know where it came from and how it is made” (Trinidad 2012, 26). To reach and educate consumers, Pendleton Woolen Mills gives mill tours and uses online platforms, such as social media and blogs. Bishop said social media and blogs help the company not only to stay relevant and reach out to consumers, but also build a sense of community where interactions with their customers can occur. Pendleton Woolen Mills uses blog posts and videos as one means of connecting and educating their consumers about the sustainability of their products. Further, the videos and blog posts highlight the long-standing relationships Pendleton has with their woolgrowers. One such video contains imagery of thousands of eastern Oregon sheep in the mountains during the summer. Cameron Krebs, a fourth generation sheep rancher, talks on the video about his family’s ranch and the relationship with Pendleton Woolen Mills (Pendleton Woolen Mills 2015). On their blog, Pendleton can tag each post with certain keywords that then allows consumers to search other posts on related topics. Those interested in wool and Pendleton’s use of the fiber can search tags such as “Pendleton wool,” “properties of wool,” “sheep,” “sheep video,” “Umatilla wool,” “wool a natural,” and “wool fun facts.”
Blog posts, videos, and Instagram photos highlighting aspects of Pendleton’s wool do not explicitly aim to sell a product, but rather they inform and entertain consumers.

Researchers and other companies have found consumers respond well to this tactic, and it in turn creates a following to the brand (Killian and McManus 2015).

Craftsmanship has been another marketing theme used during both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Enduring aspects of craftsmanship have remained, such as the emphasis on locally made products and on “superior quality and originality of design” (see Figure 25). A 1921 advertisement promotes the allure of a locally made product, stating, “Please your friends with something that is not only a little nicer, but a product of your own Home city” (East Oregonian 1921, 17 December). Another Pendleton Woolen Mills Christmas advertisement in the local Pendleton newspaper states in large, bold letters, “Boost the Home Products” (East Oregonian 1920, 23 December). The emphasis on technology has also been part of the craftsmanship theme since the earlier part of the twentieth century. A 1928 Pendleton Woolen Mills catalog stated, “Automatic looms, appliances for the scientific heat-testing of our blankets and fabrics, a new revolutionary process of dyeing wool are a few of the many advantageous features which are keeping Pendleton production abreast of the times” (Pendleton Woolen Mills 1928, 2). The emphasis on technology has continued in the twenty-first century. In a 2008 interview conducted by The Oregonian, Charles Bishop, then Vice President of Pendleton Woolen Mills, said of the craft of designing and making blankets,

The patterns had to be designed by hand, and it was tedious, time consuming and expensive. Now it's all done with computer-aided design. We can produce several patterns a day, and we have embraced that technology. But we are devoted to the old that works. We have carding
machines from the '40s and '50s because it hasn't made sense to buy new ones when the old ones work (The Oregonian 2008, 28 December).

The process of making Pendleton products and educating the public about the process has been another enduring aspect of the craftsmanship theme. Mill tours are an important marketing tool for Pendleton Woolen Mills. The tours allow visitors to see first-hand the process of making a Pendleton product. In 1922 during the Pendleton Round-up Rodeo, the mill was open to visitors, and the company urged people to “come and see them manufactured” (East Oregonian 1922, 21 September). Tours have evolved into a daily occurrence at the mills in Pendleton, Oregon and Washougal, Washington with multiple tours given each weekday. Pendleton Woolen Mills brochures were used to document the blanket-making process, allowing visitors who both took the tour and missed a tour to bring home a brochure and have a better understanding and appreciation of the work that goes into creating Pendleton Woolen Mills products. During the 1950s and into the 1990s, guides detailed the entire process of making blankets using photos and captions.

Even if not in printed form anymore, multiple daily mill tours still allow the company to promote the craftsmanship behind their products. Similar to the Bingham Copper Canyon Mine using tourism as a public relations tool (Rudd and Davis 1998), Pendleton Woolen Mills also uses tours of its mills as a way to connect with the public. Commenting on the mill tours, John Boston, the mill manager at the Pendleton mill, said, “…we really want to make a connection with our customers and show them how much quality and care goes into our products” (Johnson, “Woolen Mill Tours”). The focus on craftsmanship, particularly during mill tours, can be used as a marketing tool that gives consumers an authentic experience at a Pendleton woolen mill and shapes their
perceptions of Pendleton products and the place. Consumers are impacted by the craftsmanship they experience, and the tours have helped many consumers create a deeper appreciation for Pendleton products. Planned visits by tourists to the original Pendleton Woolen Mills can be seen as one aspect of heritage tourism as the mill is a cultural and historical attraction in which travelers see and experience the heritage of the company and the place (Timothy 2011). Mill tours are one way for visitors to experience the company heritage. Tourists partaking in heritage tourism, including those at mill tours in Pendleton, tend to be “older, wealthier, and interested in extended family and education-oriented experiences” (Kerstetter et al. 1998, 93). Tourists traveling to heritage sites do so partly to gain knowledge of places, things, and people. They may be seeking to experience a sense of nostalgia for some aspect of the past (Hawley 1990).

During conversations with travelers partaking in the Pendleton Woolen Mills tours during 2014 and 2015, I heard similar reasons from each of them for their visits. Many of the reasons, particularly from those who planned the visit, were out of some sense of nostalgia, including nostalgia for the “old West” and the role of Native Americans, family nostalgia, and to experience a historical part of the American West. Linda Parker and Dan Gutzman, both Pendleton Woolen Mills employees stationed at the company headquarters in Portland, said true mill followers go to the Pendleton site because it is more of an emotional experience (personal communication, September 17, 2014). One lady from Colorado spends her retirement traveling in a motorhome with her husband. She said, “It’s because of my mom I’m here. We’re both quilters, and years ago she bought these little squares at this store. So now I’m here to try to find them so I can
add to it” (personal communication, October 8, 2014). Another gentleman remembered touring the mill back in the 1930s before the new addition with the salesroom was built (personal communication, October 8, 2014). He now lives east of Pendleton in the city of La Grande and said he likes to come back here to visit the mill with his family. A southern California couple was visiting the region and wanted to stop at the mill because they owned Pendleton products, and they appreciated the respect the company showed for Native Americans. After the tour, they commented that they had even more appreciation for the products and the company (personal communication, May 12, 2015).

Two common stories from mill visitors who both planned their route to go through Pendleton and those who just happened to be driving through were the legacy of Pendleton Woolen Mills and a personal connection to their products because of family members who habitually and proudly wore Pendleton products. One Idaho couple was in Pendleton for business (personal communication, October 8, 2014). They said whenever they visit a place, they like to explore the community. They were familiar with Pendleton products and knew it had a long history in the West, so they wanted to make sure they visited the original mill while they were in town. Other visitors shared stories of mothers, fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers, and aunts who used to wear Pendleton shirts, skirts, or jackets. Visiting the mill reminded them of their loved ones.

Lois, an employee at the store, said, “We have our locals, but 75% of store visitors are tourists” (personal communication, October 7, 2014). While some mill visitors went on the tour simply because they stopped at the store to buy clothing, the majority of travelers visited the store and toured the mill because of their own “Pendleton
story.” The mill tours are one way the company highlights and markets their craftsmanship. In doing so, they continue to connect with their customers and strengthen their following. The tours shape visitors’ perceptions of the community of Pendleton and the surrounding region as well as Pendleton Woolen Mills products.

In addition to mill tours, another avenue Pendleton Woolen Mills uses to promote their brand, heritage, and identity to non-Pendleton residents lies in their connections with regional media outlets. Pendleton Woolen Mills frequently does interviews with well-known western media sources such as Sunset, Travel Oregon, and large regional newspapers from Los Angeles, Seattle, and Portland. Pendleton products conjure up images of the American West. Western media sources print stories that highlight the woolen mill as “one of the biggest draws” in Pendleton (Seubert 2016). John Boston, the Pendleton plant manager, said companies and news outlets from around the country come to the mill (personal communication, August 12, 2014). They have a handout they give all reporters that details the entire process of creating blankets at the mill, from bringing the wool in and processing it to the finished products. While the local newspaper occasionally prints stories about the mill, Jim Kinkead, a former employee, remembered more outside media outlets visiting the mill than the local paper (personal communication, May 12, 2015). With a variety of western sources printing stories on the mill, they are helping to shape outsiders’ views of the town and the company.

Company-sponsored celebratory events also shape perceptions of the place. Pendleton Woolen Mills celebrated their centennial in 2009 with the theme of “Weaving America’s Spirit Since 1909.” The year was celebrated both locally and regionally.
Geographer Dan Arreola (2002, 162) suggests that “celebration is yet another mainstay of group identity.” Pendleton Woolen Mills celebrated their centennial with public events, photoshoots for magazines, published promotional materials, and interviews with several newspapers. Whether a video or a photoshoot, the company focused on aspects of heritage that included the company’s one-hundred-year history, the family’s heritage in the woolen business, the continued tradition of craftsmanship, and relationships with communities, woolgrowers, and Native Americans.

One piece of promotional material produced by Pendleton Woolen Mills (in conjunction with the East Oregonian) was a special insert in the local paper titled, *Pendleton Woolen Mills at 100: One town. One brand. One company. One family.* A company timeline is included as well as a photo essay showing how blankets are made. The booklet also includes articles detailing different aspects of the history of Pendleton Woolen Mills. A common theme throughout all of the articles is community relationships. Articles highlight the close relationships between the Pendleton Woolen Mills and the town of Pendleton, local woolgrowers, and Native Americans. A company-produced online promotional video also highlights these connections (Pendleton Woolen Mills 2009). No words are used, but photos and videos show the history and heritage of Pendleton Woolen Mills and the surrounding communities. By focusing on relationships, the articles and video helps foster a deeper sense of community.

All communities have varying strengths of group identity. A strong community identity is based on the knowledge of a common past. Peirce Lewis (1979b, 41), when describing communities where the spirit of place is strong, observed that the one thing
they have in common is that they all have “a sense of shared experience.” Madan Sarup (1996, 3) defined the concept of identity as “the story we tell of ourselves and which is also the story others tell of us.” Although she was writing of personal identity, her definition can be applied to communities and places as well. One story Pendleton Woolen Mills promotes is the importance of relationships between themselves and the people of Pendleton. Their centennial highlighted the historical shared experiences between the mill and the community of Pendleton, and those shared stories and a shared heritage help foster an identity (Alexander 2009).

Pendleton Woolen Mills also had additional media campaigns to celebrate their centennial. Leopold Ketel is a Portland-based branding agency that produces videos, photos, and designs with the aim to create a message. For the centennial celebration of Pendleton Woolen Mills, Leopold Ketel created print ads, a television commercial, and a corporate video that all reminded “employees and customers of the brand’s heritage” (Leopold Ketel, “Pendleton Woolen Mills”). The content the company produced highlighted Pendleton’s western heritage. Print ads and videos featured cowboys, cattle, and eastern Oregon landscapes. One tag line used in a print ad reads, “How the West was, is and forever will be worn,” and suggests the quality of Pendleton products as well as its legacy in the American West.

Photoshoots and videos at the Pendleton woolen mill and at the historic Cunningham Sheep Ranch in Umatilla County were all part of the company’s centennial celebration. Additionally, events were held and exhibits displayed in Pendleton. Some were small, such as an open house with refreshments at the Heritage Station Museum, the
town’s local museum (East Oregonian 2009, 9 February). Pendleton Woolen Mills organized other events, such as the launching of the centennial celebration at the Pendleton mill on President’s Day 2009 (East Oregonian 2009, 25 February). The celebration included a rededication of the mill and the addition of Native American artifacts to the Pendleton store’s Heritage Collection Museum. Mort Bishop III also presented the company’s one-hundredth anniversary marketing theme to the Pendleton Rotary Club where he laid out the company’s history and the ways they have remained relevant to American culture. Additionally, he discussed the uniqueness of the town of Pendleton and its potential to draw people to the city (East Oregonian 2009, 12 May). Bishop’s discussion of both the Pendleton mill and the community shows what some in Pendleton believe is a “continued commitment to the well-being of our community” (East Oregonian 2009, 8 March).

Based on interviews and newspaper editorials and articles, some Pendleton residents and business owners still see Pendleton Woolen Mills as part of the community’s identity. Pendleton Woolen Mills celebrated their centennial in part by highlighting the community of Pendleton, and the community in turn celebrated the mill. Some Pendleton organizations took the centennial as a time to honor the mill and its role in the community. One organization, the Pendleton Center for the Arts, celebrated the mill by putting together a year’s worth of exhibits that featured fibers and textiles (East Oregonian 2009, 13 March). The centennial was also a time for Pendleton residents and the East Oregonian to express their appreciation and thoughts on the Pendleton Woolen Mills. An editorial written by the East Oregonian editorial board continues to see the mill
as a central part of the community. The editorial stated, “We give Pendleton blankets as wedding presents and to dignitaries as symbols of pride in the community in which we live. We collect them in our homes and pass them down through generations.” The editorial continues with, “In an age when community identity is an important commodity, most cities would be thrilled to have the national and international branding accorded the city of Pendleton” (East Oregonian 2009, 8 March). Skip Nichols, a Pendleton resident, wrote a letter to the newspaper on the joy of receiving the Fall 2009 Pendleton catalog that featured photoshoots at the Pendleton mill and at the Cunningham Sheep Ranch. Nichols wrote, “We are proud of the heritage of Pendleton Woolen Mills and its important contribution to the tribes, our state and county and individual families. The catalog certainly reflects that proud legacy” (East Oregonian 2009, 5 August).

Pendleton Woolen Mills has helped shape the place identity of Pendleton in part because “the presence of the mill and legend of the products is so intertwined in our [Pendleton’s] history” (East Oregonian 2009, 8 March), but also because of their present support and presence in the community. The Pendleton mill is smaller than the Washougal mill, but Pendleton Woolen Mills, especially during the centennial, promoted the original mill as their “home.” In the Fall 2009 catalog, Bishop wrote, “…our home [is] on the Columbia Plateau along the Umatilla River at the base of Oregon’s Blue Mountains.” The world-renowned company has the influence to shape outsider’s perceptions of the place as well as those who live in northeastern Oregon and are proud of the mill and its role in making Pendleton a unique place.

Pendleton Woolen Mills president, Mort Bishop III, said about the company’s
centennial, “One of our goals as we went into our centennial year was not only to embrace our heritage, but also to reinvent the future by sharing our history” (The Oregonian 2009, 23 December). Geographer David Lowenthal (1975, 8) wrote, “The intimate continuity of past with present is a source of general comfort.” Pendleton Woolen Mills, with their mill tours, celebratory events, and other marketing campaigns, have turned to embracing their company history and western heritage that connects visitors and consumers with the past. Additionally, they are able to blend their heritage with the present, creating “a source of general comfort” for both older and younger generations.

Since the beginning, the Pendleton Woolen Mills Company has used aspects of place and heritage to promote their brand and connect with their customers. During their early years as a company and again during their centennial, they focused more on the “local” with promotions and advertisements highlighting their “home” in Pendleton and northeastern Oregon. The company quickly expanded to include not just local place branding, but also regional place branding in many of their products and advertisements. Although the Umatilla Reservation near Pendleton, Oregon was an early Native American connection, they also had business relationships with many other regional western Native American tribes, such as the Navajo in the Southwest. They worked closely with the tribes to produce products based on place and local culture. The company also utilizes regional place names in many of their products. In an interview with Linda Parker and Dan Gutzman, they said they felt Pendleton products fit with the identity of the West. They continued, commenting that both the name “Pendleton” and
the products have an iconic Northwest aura and feel, not just a northeastern Oregon identity (personal communication, September 17, 2014). Dan and Linda feel that for most people, the products and name are not associated primarily with the town of Pendleton or Umatilla County. Rather, “Pendleton” conjures up images of the entire Northwest.

**Pendleton Woolen Mills Workers**

Workers at the mill also play a role in shaping the community of Pendleton. On a smaller scale, the employees of the mill in Pendleton created their own community. It is a community that is not as visible to outsiders, but one that continues to impact the mill, neighborhoods, and homes. Between 2014 and 2015, I formally interviewed seven Pendleton Woolen Mills employees who have all had various roles at the Pendleton mill. Four were retired or no longer working there, and the remaining three were current employees. I also had several informal conversations with employees while visiting the mill. Local and regional newspaper stories featuring the mill and interviews with employees also provided insights on the experiences of mill employees. Newspaper stories, conversations, and in-depth interviews revealed how the mill has changed, the sense of family that employees found there, and how working at the mill shaped employees’ outlooks of Pendleton.

The majority of memories and “invisible landscapes” held by mill workers took place at the woolen mill. Buildings are full of meaning and value to communities. One reason is because they are places where memories accrued (Tuan 1975; Hareven and Langenbach 1981; Arreola 2002; Whelan 2005). For employees of Pendleton Woolen Mills, the mill building not only holds a plethora of memories, but many associate the
mill with their own personal and family lives. During interviews, employees commented that the work conducted and the wages earned made it possible for them to provide for themselves and their families. The mill also houses other memories, such as the integrity and value of hard work and the friendships formed and sustained for decades. Interviews with those who spent years at the mill indicate the Pendleton woolen mill is to them, a “great building” as it provides an “image of communal life and values” among many of its former employees (Tuan 1975, 162).

Interviews, Polk Directories, and newspaper articles revealed that many Pendleton Woolen Mills employees worked at the mill for decades, especially those who worked there during the twentieth century. The company even had a 25-Year Club and beginning in 1969, they held annual celebrations for those who worked at the mill for 25 years and longer. The 1975 program lists 27 Pendleton Woolen Mills employees who worked at the mill for at least 25 years (Pendleton Public Library Archives). While turnover is slightly higher in the twenty-first century, the consensus among most employees was that the mill provided reasonable wages, and it was “good work.”

“Good work” or something in a similar vein was a common and repeated statement among employees. Richard Crosby, who worked at the mill from 1951 to 1996, commented that the “demands for efforts from those advanced in years” was reasonable (personal communication, May 5, 2015). He explained that the mill worked with individuals if they could not complete assigned tasks because of their age or if it was damaging to their health. Louise Rice worked at the mill for over 30 years. When talking about the work she did, she said, “It really was interesting to stand there and watch that
blanket as you made it progress. You watched it being made, and that was really something. You can’t really describe it. But it made you feel a little special” (personal communication, October 7, 2014). Don Buchannan worked at the mill for more than 60 years. He said perfection was one of the reasons he stayed with the company for so long. The wool is carefully chosen, and Pendleton Woolen Mills products have a reputation for quality. Buchannan said, “We feel we owe perfection to the community” (East Oregonian 1988, September). All of the employees interviewed felt a sense of satisfaction and pride about their work, which ultimately helps Pendleton Woolen Mills achieve their reputation of quality-made products.

Even though many employees saw their work as “good,” interviewees also acknowledged and stressed that the work was physically demanding. While some of the comments and critiques of the mill were subtle, others were quite candid. Factory work is demanding, requiring employees to work all day standing on hard flooring and handle potentially dangerous equipment. Many employees have a story of being in an accident or almost getting hurt. Some still mentioned ailments years after retirement that were a result of the factory work. Further, their job security relies on strong market demands for the products they are creating. When difficult economic conditions plague the company, there is always a threat of layoffs. In 2009, 20 employees were let go from the Pendleton mill (East Oregonian 2009, 2 July).

Despite the critiques, many felt the company was fair. Fairness, whether in employee dealings or wages, was another reason many worked there for so long. Louise Rice said part of the reason she started working there and stayed for so long was that it
was the highest paying job for women in the area (personal communication, October 7, 2014). Patricia Heathman said the mill “helped put her three children through school” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). Richard Crosby commented that the mill “remains a dependable source of income for many people” (personal communication, May 5, 2015). Don Buchanan simply said, “The company has always been fair in dealing with its employees” (East Oregonian 1988, September).

It was not uncommon for family members, such as husbands and wives, daughters and sons, aunts and uncles, and nieces and nephews to work together. Floyd Heathman worked at the mill for 42 years. His father also worked at the mill. When Floyd started dating Patricia, whom he later married, he helped her get a job at the mill. Patricia’s daughter also worked at the mill for a year to help pay for college. Others could not recall specific family relations, but commented that it was not unusual for relatives to work in the mill together. Indeed, an examination of Polk Directories indicates that it was not infrequent for both parents and children to work at the mill. Word of mouth helped family members and friends become interested in the mill and apply for jobs. Jim Kinkead started working for the mill shortly after he graduated from high school. “I had friends working here and it seemed like a good company,” Kinkead said (The Oregonian 2008, 28 December).

Even if employees were not related biologically, Louise Rice and Patricia Heathman said they became like family. Patricia said, “It was a good group of people. Kind of like family. We worked in close quarters so of course you got to know them” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). Louise echoed a similar statement, saying
simply, “The mill was my family” (personal communication, October 7, 2014). The women I interviewed especially commented on the “family” aspect of the mill. They shared memories of break room potlucks as adding a sense of connection among the employees. Many of the memories that were shared with me involved memories of working with other people that then in turn created a family atmosphere.

While employees did not know everybody who worked at the mill, they did know those who worked on their floor. Much of the work was divided not only by floors, but also by gender. While it was not a clear-cut division, especially for leadership roles, such as foremen, women and men tended to work in different departments. Louise Rice recalled women working in the weaving and spinning departments, while men worked in the carding, maintenance, and dyehouse departments (personal communication, October 7, 2014). The gendered labor is also evident in historical photos that often show the roles of men, such as in the carding department (Figure 5-28) and fixing the mill equipment (Figure 5-29) and in Polk Directories that list specific positions at the mill.
Figure 5-28. A Pendleton employee working in the carding department. Provided courtesy of Pendleton Woolen Mills, Inc. (PWM, 1948)
Once retired, some workers continue to visit the mill occasionally. Richard Crosby, who retired in 1996, said he still goes to the mill quite often. He said, “Sometimes I am asked to come in. The mill sometimes has events where retired employees are asked to come to the mill” (personal communication, May 5, 2015).

Patricia Heathman said she and her husband, Floyd, used to visit the mill. Sometimes they would even get a grand tour of the mill if new equipment was installed (personal communication, May 11, 2015). Louise also occasionally visits the mill.

Once in a great while, I’ll go down there. Mainly to order blankets. I went down there for Terry Widel’s party to celebrate his working there for 40 years. It wasn’t anything big and fancy, but it acknowledged he had been there for 40 years. And when I retired they had cake and punch for me (personal communication, October 7, 2014).
For many retired workers, decades were spent working at the mill. Although many acknowledged they enjoy retirement and do not miss the hard work, the mill continues to hold thousands of memories and draws former employees back to the building for certain occasions.

Employees enjoyed company gatherings and celebrations. Another frequently mentioned critique was the loss of these employee gatherings, such as summer picnics and the 25-Year Club reception where long-time employees were taken out to dinner by the company. Patricia Heathman has many fond memories of the receptions, saying, “I really miss that! That was nice. They had nice dinners. And I’ve got pictures of all of this” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). It was a gathering where employees were celebrated and awards were given. Interviewees commented that they believe financial “times have got a little rough, and they’ve cut back on expanses” (personal communication, October 7, 2014).

The woolen mill is where employees have their memories and where some of them “became like family.” As a result of the memories that accrued under the mill’s roof, it is the building that is the focal point of current and former employees’ “invisible landscapes” (Ryden 1999). Walking around town, however, can quickly connect them back to the mill. Seeing products around town reminds many of them of the mill and their time there. Jim Kinkead worked at the mill for 31 years. He said, “Seeing Pendleton products conjures up memories of the place” (personal communication, May 12, 2015). Patricia Heathman noticed there were “lots of people around town [who] wear Pendleton products.” She continued, saying, “Even the pastor’s wife wears it!” (personal
Many Pendleton residents continue to see the woolen mill as one distinct aspect of their community. Pat Beard, an employee at the Chamber of Commerce, said, “There’s a sense of pride when you see Pendleton clothing or blankets. That’s the connection you have. It’s local. It’s made in Pendleton” (personal communication, August 8, 2014). Those who have worked there also see Pendleton Woolen Mills as adding immense value to the community. Terry Widel, a supervisor at the mill, said, “Pendleton Woolen Mills is a great service for the community” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). Jim Kinkead saw the mill as a unique addition to the town. Not only does the mill add a distinct character to the community, but it provides a unique opportunity for those who work there. Kinkead said, “Since there are very few woolen mills left in the United States, working in textiles is unique” (personal communication, May 12, 2015).

The homes of mill employees also reflect their connections to their work and the mill. Floyd Heathman worked at the mill for 42 years, and used items from the mill, such as discarded machinery, to decorate his yard. Other mementos from the mill were kept in safe places inside the home (personal communication, May 11, 2015). Jim Kinkead kept a copy of a 1984 Pendleton Woolen Mills employee newsletter that announced the birth of his daughter. Patricia Heathman also remembers the newsletters, saying, “The mill would send them out about once a month. And it had pictures you know of people that would get different awards or what was going on or who got married, or had a baby. Or passed away” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). She continued saying, “It kept us informed of what was going on with one another and the company.” Those
interviewed said they enjoyed the newsletter, but it is no longer published. For Pendleton Woolen Mill’s 100th anniversary celebration, several employees were part of a photo-shoot. Louise Rice recalled the day, saying, “It was special” (personal communication, October 7, 2014). At the time, she did not know the photo would be shown in New York City’s Times Square. She now proudly has the photo enlarged and framed in her home.

Many mill employees owned one or more Pendleton blankets. Louise Rice has several memories of her blankets. One such memory is of her very first Pendleton blanket.

I have the very first blanket I ever bought. I was working graveyard and my mom and dad came over just to stay with me that weekend. They were going to a fiddle show. And I had a chance to double back and work swing shift for overtime. And they took care of my boy for me. And when I walked in the mill a few minutes early. I don’t know why but I walked in through the sales room and here’s this blanket. My mother always wanted a blanket but never had the money. I had the money, but no, no I don’t want one. When I walked through the sales room, it just hit me. Uncle Sam is getting the first half of this night, and I bought my mother a blanket. When she passed away, I got it back. That was back in 71 I believe. It’s in there in the cedar closet. She used it all the time. The next morning, my kid, he wasn’t very old. Maybe 3, 3 ½. So the next morning when I got up, I hollered at him. He was up. I said come here. So he drug this, I was living in a single wide trailer, he drug this big bag down the hallway to grandmas. Different things like that I remember with fond memories (personal communication, October 7, 2014).

Dolores Hayden (1995, 46) found that “places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past.” Pendleton Woolen Mills employees may have worked during different time periods, on different floors, and had different specific jobs, but they were all part of the Pendleton Woolen Mills family. They each worked at the iconic mill and lived in or around Pendleton. For every employee interviewed, aspects of place, from the actual mill or its machinery to the streets of Pendleton, triggered memories of
Pendleton Woolen Mills and their time working at the mill. Not only did their working years impact their sense of identity and outlook of Pendleton and the mill, but they also played a vital role in making Pendleton known for its mill. Without their labor, the mill could not operate and the character of Pendleton would be different.

The Pendleton Chamber of Commerce

Pendleton community institutions, particularly the Chamber of Commerce, promote the woolen mill through brochures, websites and social media content, street signage, and occasional promotional materials. The tourism campaigns focus on the history, heritage, and authenticity of the town. Pat Beard, the head of Travel Pendleton, which is a branch of the Chamber of Commerce that focuses on tourism, is a promoter of Pendleton. He’s enthusiastic about the town and its history. During a walk through the downtown area, he said about their tourism campaigns and efforts, “We just want to embrace our history and our heritage. We strive to be authentic in tourism.” He continued, saying, “The future has to do with our past” (personal communication, August 8, 2014). Beard and Travel Pendleton work to highlight Pendleton’s past. Travel Pendleton’s website states, “Best known for legendary rodeo, fine woolens and leather craftsmanship, Pendleton has a well-deserved reputation as a town where the best of western tradition and heritage lives on.” One way the town has marketed their history and heritage is by putting up signs in the downtown area to help guide tourists to different attractions. Beginning in 2010, the signs were placed around the downtown area. Accompanying the signs are historical photos and vignettes that inform readers of part of the history of an event or attraction. Geographers have shown that many communities
have goals of embracing and sharing an “authentic heritage” in tourism campaigns (Hoelscher and Oستergren 1993; Schnell 2003). Many times, however, the historic roots are real, but the meanings and stories current residents tell about their heritage and history evolve (Schnell 2003).

Embracing their history and heritage is not a new concept for the community. Promotional materials from throughout the twentieth century highlight the “western traditions” found in Pendleton and Umatilla County. In 1962, Umatilla County celebrated its centennial. A special issue newspaper-magazine included vignettes of the county’s towns, businesses, and ranches. Multiple pages were dedicated to Pendleton Woolen Mills and their role in maintaining Northwest traditions. One article in the magazine states about Pendleton Woolen Mills, “As the influence of the western way of living has increased, so Pendleton has spread to every corner of the nation, continuing to reflect the spirit of the Pacific Northwest” (East Oregonian 1962). Maps can reveal aspects of place identity by including artwork, such as symbols to represent places (Sepe 2009; Hornsby 2017). A map in the centennial publication shows an image of a colorful blanket near the town of Pendleton (Figure 5-30). While Pendleton’s identity is connected to multiple activities such as the rodeo and cowboys, Pendleton Woolen Mills was also included to symbolize the town and its western traditions.
Figure 5-30. A county promotional map from 1962 showing a colorful blanket, reminiscent of a Pendleton blanket, near the city (East Oregonian 1962).

Towns promote themselves in various ways. “Image makers” present towns to the outside world in a particular way by constructing an identity and consequently branding a locality (Adema 2006). Pat Beard is a Pendleton image maker. In a conversation with Beard, he spoke of history, heritage, locally made products, and authenticity as themes in
their tourism campaigns. He sees the woolen mill as adding a distinct character to the community and making it a special place. Reflecting on the mill’s role in shaping the community, he said, “There’s a sense of pride when you see Pendleton clothing or blankets. That’s the connection you have. It’s local. It’s made in Pendleton” (personal communication, August 8, 2014). Beard’s approach in promoting Pendleton speaks to the sense of connectedness that some people crave, and it is part of the reason communities have embraced neolocal ideas in their marketing and branding (Schnell 2013).

One of Travel Pendleton’s slogans is “Pendleton is handmade everyday.” Schnell (2013) found that people identify with locally made products. They are seen as higher quality and authentic. Locally made products are also portrayed as closely connected to place, history, and tradition. Pendleton Woolen Mills not only creates locally made products, but they have a long and rich history in Pendleton. Their history and products help image makers shape an identity of Pendleton as a place where “local things are made by local people” (Schnell 2013, 70). Travel Pendleton highlights multiple locally made products, including leather crafts and woolen goods, in an attempt to appeal to tourists. Their latest advertising campaign has been labeled, “The Hipster Project.” Their goal is to entice the younger generation from urban areas such as Portland and Seattle to Pendleton to experience Pendleton’s local and unique styles and crafts (East Oregonian 2015, 1 August). While some in town think little of the idea, others are hoping a younger generation will want to experience local, handmade, and authentic products, including the experiential tours at Pendleton Woolen Mills and their products.

Tours at the mill are not a recent phenomenon. The town of Pendleton has
branded the tours as part of an experiential tourism in their latest tourism campaign (Washington Times 2015, 22 August). Researchers suggest that “modern tourists want to experience a ‘sense of place’ when visiting a destination” (Konecnik and Go 2008, 181). One way to achieve that is through experiential tourism where visitors obtain a sense of character of the place (Domenico and Miller 2012). Textile manufacturers are rare in the United States, and by promoting the mill through the avenue of experiential tourism, the Chamber of Commerce hopes to brand Pendleton as an authentic, western place where one can experience “the West.”

Websites and social media marketing have been a large part of the Chamber of Commerce and *Travel Pendleton’s* marketing strategies to brand Pendleton. Websites and social media help shape people’s perceptions of places, both accurate and inaccurate, and allow them to gain a sense of place, particularly before they visit them (Govers and Go 2005). Geographers have recently begun to use online sites, from businesses’ websites to social media, as a means of analyzing place marketing and branding used in products and by places (Matthews and Brasher 2016; Matthews and Patton 2016). Geographer Ben Marsh (1987, 338) defined place identity as the story a town tells itself, or its autogeography. “What is this town?” is one of the questions Marsh suggested to ask when exploring a town’s identity. We can also look at local websites to understand the story they are selling to tourists. What does the city promote as a must-do when visiting? The city of Pendleton’s official website lists “Top 11 Things to See and Do in Pendleton.” They list “Take a tour of the Pendleton Woolen Mills” as the number two experience to accurately experience Pendleton (City of Pendleton, “Top 11 Things”).
Another website associated with Pendleton’s Chamber of Commerce is *Travel Pendleton*, which also utilizes websites and social media sites, such as Instagram and Facebook, to reach out to tourists. The images the websites portray shape people’s perceptions of the region. While Pendleton broadly promotes tourist amenities such as the availability of outdoor activities, their message is focused on describing a place of authenticity, where goods are still made locally and one can experience the Old West. *Travel Pendleton*’s tagline reads, “Rich Tradition. Fine Craftsmanship. Legendary Reputation.” Pendleton Woolen Mills is one of many aspects of Pendleton’s rich traditions, craftsmanship, and legendary character that the sites promote.

In exploring neolocal advocates, Schnell (2013, 69) suggested that “as globalization accelerates…some people increasingly yearn to return to an idealized past.” Part of the “idealized past” in Pendleton is one consisting of a community of hard-working, honest westerners who have a proud heritage. The story of the community coming together to keep the woolen mill in operation and local people working hard to make products that are worn by people all around the world fits with an idealized past, and the Chamber of Commerce’s vision of Pendleton highlights those aspects of the Pendleton story in their advertising campaigns.

**The Local Newspaper: The East Oregonian**

Local newspapers often reflect changing ways of life in a community. Newspapers tend to feature stories deemed important to the community, and items readers will find “newsworthy.” In Pendleton, the primary local newspaper, the *East Oregonian*, has printed stories on the woolen mill since the late nineteenth century. As
the mill’s role in the community has changed, the newspaper’s emphasis on the mill, its production, and its employees has also changed. Between 1885 and 1910, the newspaper took on a booster mentality as articles consistently promoted the mill. For much of the twentieth century, the newspaper continued to play a considerable role in promoting the mill and featuring stories on various aspects of life at the mill. Since the latter part of the twentieth century, stories focus on changes at the mill, such as new technology. The newspaper rarely focuses on individuals working at the mill, which does not help in building a sense of community identity around the mill.

The *East Oregonian* served as a venue for promoting the building of a scouring plant and a woolen mill. The paper frequently published articles touting “Pendleton is a woolen mill town.” Under Bishop ownership and management, the business was a reliable source of income for the community. The *East Oregonian* continued to show its support for the business, even printing statements such as, “The value to Pendleton of such an industry can be readily seen” (1910, February 25, 4). The newspaper also worked to make people aware of the mill’s history (1912, 26-28 September). Even without the paper’s promotion of the industry, the mill was considered a significant part of the community. Therefore, the newspaper did not only print promotional pieces, but they also kept readers informed of happenings at the mill. News items were not necessarily headline stories, but they were persistently visible. Themes included news on trades and sales of blankets and other products (1911, 9 August), quality of wool and wool prices (1912, 29 February; 1916, 22 September), the impact of war on the mill (1917, 15 December; 1918, 21 September), new machines (1919, 26 September), and the woolen
The mill baseball team (1922, 29 April).

One reason the mill was viewed as such an important part of the community was its association with the local sheep and wool industry. Newspaper items frequently mentioned the abundance of local wool as continued support for the mill and part of the reason for its success (East Oregonian 1916, September 22). They praised the relationship between the mill and local woolgrowers as evidence of the mill benefiting a variety of people, from the manufacturing employees, town businesses, and the local sheepmen (East Oregonian 1912, February 29).

During the latter half of the twentieth century themes of new technology, new services, and the history and heritage of the mill were common stories in the *East Oregonian*. The everyday news, such as new technology (1987, 15 September) and new services (1972, 5 June), reflect a community that is still interested in the everyday happenings at the mill. The stories of history and heritage sometimes coincided with other historical celebrations, such as the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail (East Oregonian 1993, 28 August) and the Pendleton Centennial (East Oregonian 1980, 1 September). Other times, the stories with a heritage focus were not originally written locally, but were then reprinted in the local newspaper.

When the mill started to become more automated with its technology and machinery, fewer workers were needed. Louise Rice recalled that when she first started working at the mill in the 1970s, there were around 100 employees. In 2011, she estimated there were 50 workers (personal communication, October 7, 2014). Fewer workers meant that fewer townspeople were affected directly by the mill’s happenings.
According to former Pendleton Woolen Mill employees, company events and gatherings started to become fewer as well. Many of the long-time employees retired. All of these variables indicate the mill was not as central in the community’s happenings. As a result, the local newspaper ran fewer stories, while regional and national newspapers continued to feature the original Pendleton Woolen Mills in stories (Oregonian 2008, 28 December). During Pendleton Woolen Mills’ centennial celebration, however, the local paper temporarily printed more history and heritage stories. Readers submitted their sentiments that indicated a pride for the mill and the community.

Storytelling is an important part of place. Researchers have shown that “story” or narrative is a powerful tool in connecting people to place and shaping identities (Dominy 2001; Sampson and Goodrich 2009). Some newspapers, such as the local papers in Big Timber, Montana and Elko, Nevada, occasionally highlight stories about individuals who are or were involved in activities that the community sees as a unique aspect of their place, such as sheep herding or shearing. The stories reflect the heritage of the communities and contribute to the communities’ awareness and knowledge of the past. In recent years, the East Oregonian, however, lacks stories highlighting personal narratives about the local mill. Rather than engaging in narratives that emphasize heritage, community, and individuals, articles about the mill are written to simply inform readers of such information as lay-offs (2009, 2 July) and market expansion (2016, August 26). The exception is during recent celebration years, such as Pendleton Woolen Mills centennial in 2009 when the East Oregonian did print stories about the heritage of Pendleton Woolen Mills and its role in the community. The overall lack of storytelling
about life at Pendleton Woolen Mills during the majority of years does little in regards to directly connecting the community to the mill. The lack of mill narratives also inhibits the sharing of social memories. Geographers have shown the sharing of social memories is vital in a cohesive community identity (Alexander 2009). While there are other ways for communities to share their memories and connect to place, the local newspaper is one outlet for reaching the entire community, and the *East Oregonian* rarely features such stories.

**Family: The Heathman Family**

Researchers have shown that individuals who work in nature have deep attachments to place. Ranchers are one such example. They work in all elements and have memories attached to the landscape (Knapp and Fernandez-Gimenez 2008). Their “invisible landscapes” are numerous (Ryden 1993). As a result of their time working as ranchers and in familiar landscapes, an identity attached to their way of life develops. It is not, however, only ranchers and others working in nature who are shaped by their working experiences. Working in any place for years creates memories and can help foster and shape an identity with many different types of work.

There has been a movement to tell the silenced stories of workers, from seasonal farm workers to the role of women and minorities (Harrison 2010). Too often, the stories of those working in factories are not heard. As a result, we miss out on the stories and the role of a portion of the population that helps create places. In her study of urban communities in Los Angeles, Dolores Hayden (1995, 95) advocates that
“…individuals…need to find ways to connect to the larger urban narrative. Individual lives are unique and resist stereotyping, but pasts are woven together in the making of the cultural landscape and community spirit of an urban center.” Patricia Heathman worked at the Pendleton Woolen Mills for 32 years. Exploring in-depth a Pendleton Woolen Mills employee and her family shows how the mill has not only shaped Pendleton’s place identity, but also how it has shaped life at a much smaller scale. The mill under the Bishop family ownership has shaped the lives of numerous families in Pendleton since the early twentieth century. Those working there have then played a role in shaping the narrative of Pendleton’s story. Patricia Heathman’s story is one example of the impact the mill has had on a Pendleton family.

Patricia and her family have a long relationship with the Pendleton woolen mills. She worked there from 1952 until 1985. Her husband, Floyd, worked as a foreman at the mill for an even longer period of time. Floyd’s father also worked at the mill. When two of her children were older, they, too, spent a small amount of time working at the local woolen mill. “You have a lot of memories over 32 years,” Patricia told me as she reflected on her time there (personal communication, May 11, 2015; February 1, 2017). Many of the memories are intertwined between the mill, her home, her neighborhood, and the town of Pendleton. Mementos in her home bring her back to her time at the mill, memories with family and friends, and dinners and picnics at various places in town. For her, the mill is filled with personal “history and significance” (Ryden 1999). As Yi-Fu Tuan (1975, 61) wrote, a great building means “experiences accumulated under its
shelter,” and for Patricia, those experiences involved both hardships and joys, and she is reminded of them often, even thirty years after her retirement.

The Mill

Memories are often anchored to a specific place, whether that is a particular mountain ridge or a building (Robertson 2006). In their research of historic industrial cities, Hareven and Langenbach (1981, 116) found that “…buildings were so significant to people’s memories because of their associations with other people, such as family members, friends, neighbours, and fellow workers, with whom they had shared these experiences.” For Patricia Heathman, the Pendleton woolen mill holds numerous memories, and often times, those memories are indeed connected to family members and friends who worked at the mill with her.

“I think we were kind of a family. When you work in the aisle, there’s not very much space. There was enough you could pass to get out around your loom, but when you work in the aisle like that with somebody 8 hours a day, 5 days a week for several years, yeah you get to know them. You can’t hardly not get to know them!” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). Even after retirement, Patricia remained close with the friends she made at the mill. One fellow mill worker was even her neighbor who lived “right there in that house” Patricia said as she pointed out the window in her home. Sometimes during the recounting of her time spent at the loom or in the break room, Patricia would remember her friends. She would not always go into detail on specific memories, but rather, simply smile softly and acknowledge them. “Opal! Yeah, she drew in the warps. But Opal and Olive. Olive, she was a warp dresser. They have spools that
they put all the yarn on the wheel. Yeah, that’s what Olive did. She liked it” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). When memories of former mill employees were brought up, Patricia always mentioned Richard Crosby who worked there for over forty years. “That man knew everything about that woolen mill. I don’t know what they did when he left. He knew everything about the mill, inside and out” (personal communication, May 11, 2015). Patricia said Richard and his wife remained close with her and Floyd even after they all retired. The mill used to sponsor dinners for those who worked at the mill for 25 or more years. Patricia remembered them, saying, “I really miss that. That was nice!” Patricia looked forward to those evenings when she and her husband could visit with their friends who they worked so closely with for decades. They could recount their shared experiences at the woolen mill, which contributed to feeling a sense of community.

Patricia was a weaver at the mill for over three decades. Many of the memories she shared take place by one of her looms. More than thirty years after retirement, she said, “I still have dreams of running that loom” (personal communication, February 1, 2017). While the looms the weavers use today are highly automated and computerized, Patricia remembers working on the old jacquard looms. For Patricia, it is the old looms that are connected to many of her work memories at the mill. Reminiscing about the looms, she said, “When they were getting ready to remodel, they were moving a bunch of that stuff out. They put this one loom that I was working on out in the rewind room. That’s all changed up there, too. But anyway, that was the last old jacquard, and Terry
took a picture of that and brought it to me after I retired. And it had a Chief Jo pattern on it. So I thought that was pretty special” (personal communication, May 11, 2015).

Similar to ranchers recounting hazardous experiences involving storms, broken down trucks, and hours of searching for animals in specific landscapes, mill workers are also exposed to dangerous situations, and their stories are anchored to a specific place in the mill or even a piece of equipment. Patricia remembers many of the perils of working at the loom, saying, “It was good. It’s nicer to talk about than to do it!” At 89 years old, she’s still reminded of the mill and the looms when she looks at her hands.

The last manicure I had, she was massaging my hand, and she says, what’s that? Well, the loom had a metal handle on it that you had to pull on and shut off. And continually when you’re changing shuttles and every few stripes and you have two shuttles that you have to change. One has one color, one has the other, and you’re just continually hitting that. Well when you’re doing that every few seconds 8 hours a day, it caused that [a large bump] in my hand. I think about asking the doctor about it, but I’m left handed. And it doesn’t bother me (personal communication, May 11, 2015).

Repeatedly during interviews with Patricia, she would comment about working at the mill and on the old looms, “It was hard work.” She remembers crawling up and down the loom to unhook the patterns, and one time she dislocated her knee while doing so. Patricia also associates working at the loom to her arthritis and varicose veins “from standing on that cement floor. It’s hard. They had a rubber mat but you weren’t always on that. You had to go around behind the loom.”

Not all of Patricia’s memories working on the jacquard looms involve the hazards of the job. During conversations with her, she smiled when thinking about the blankets she created at the Pendleton woolen mill. “When that loom ran good, I really enjoyed it. I really did enjoy it. Because when you got off work, you had accomplished something.
Something that somebody could use and enjoy. Yeah, it was good” (personal communication, May 11, 2015).

She also remembers visitors watching her work on the loom, such as those on mill tours and people from the Bishop family or the corporate office. Remembering all of the tourists during the Pendleton Round-Up, Patricia shook her head at the memories of multiple people standing “right there at the end of the loom” making it more difficult for her to work. One visitor at a time was less challenging, and Patricia still remembers when the late Clarence Bishop’s wife came to watch Patricia work. Patricia recounted the memory, saying,

One day she was standing there and I was running my jacquard loom. And I stopped, and she says, ‘It just amazes me. It’s just like magic.’ Because we had shuttles; they don’t have shuttles anymore. They had shuttles that went back and forth. And yeah, they’re a great family (personal communication, May 11, 2015).

The Pendleton woolen mill is a “great building” that “helps maintain individual identities” (Robertson 2006, 10). Patricia Heathman has numerous memories associated with the mill, and even after her retirement, those memories and the mill contribute to her personal identity. On an even smaller scale, within the building, Patricia has experiences and stories anchored to specific places, and in particular, a specific piece of equipment. The mill and its interior landscapes play a considerable role in recounting Patricia’s identity as a Pendleton Woolen Mills weaver.

The Heathman House

A personal dwelling place, or home, is a “storehouse of identity symbols” (Cuba and Hummon 1993, 119). Part of Patricia’s identity is as a former weaver for Pendleton
Woolen Mills. Her home in Pendleton is filled with objects that remind and connect her to the local woolen mill and the memories she has of the place and its people. “This is where my home is. I can’t imagine leaving. I’ve been here 54 years. My kids tease me about all my treasures. But while I’m here, I’m going to enjoy them. And yeah, I do have a lot of things from the woolen mills” (personal communication, February 1, 2017).

Throughout Patricia’s home are clocks, photos, blankets, clothing, and old machinery, and each item has memories associated with it. “Any ranch in sight could start a story” for Ivan Doig’s father (Doig 1978, 13), and for Patricia Heathman, every object in and around her house could also start a story. “That mantel clock there was a gift from Pendleton Woolen Mills,” she said pointing to a clock in her living room. “They gave it to my husband. He worked there 42 years. And at 40 years, they presented him with a chime clock. And now it sits on my mantel” (personal communication, May 11, 2015).

Many of the items in Patricia’s house that remind her of the mill are Pendleton Woolen Mills products, including blankets.

When we retired, the woolen mills gave us each a choice. I took a Chief Jo and my husband took a Harding. When Marty [her son] got married, we got him an Eagle blanket. My oldest son, I had a couple of Chief Jo blankets here and he took one. I also have a Chief Joseph robe on my couch. I don’t know whether I made it or not.

Other Pendleton Woolen Mills products are extra special to Patricia as they are so closely connected to her husband.

When Smoke joined the Navy, they gave him a tee-pee blanket. I have that on my closet shelf. About a year ago, we took them down to look at them. That blanket is worth quite a bit of money, but I wouldn’t sell it. It’s my husbands. And he had a jacket that was made from a Harding blanket.
To Patricia who worked at the mill for 32 years, the Pendleton Woolen Mills products are not simply quality pieces of work. Rather, they are associated with personal hard work, memories of making blankets, and memories of friends and family.

Products also remind Patricia of specific locations in the mill. “I used to buy my boys, they were seconds, you’d have to be a weaver and know. We used to buy those shirts for ten dollars. It was a special place upstairs. It was just for the employees.”

Patricia does not just have objects in her house that remind her of the mill. Her house is uniquely decorated on the outside with items taken from the mill. “This door that I have in the basement, that’s the front door that came off the side of the building when they remodeled that and put in other doors.” Her husband liked to collect old items from the mill. Patricia remembers a not uncommon event, saying, “We’d get off work and go out and look in the back of the pickup, and there’d be something in it. ‘What’s that?’ I’d ask. ‘Ohhh something one of the guys gave me,’ Smoke would say. He loved his yard.”

Patricia’s yard still continues items Smoke brought home from the mill. “There’s some big chunks of rock out here. When they put the elevator in, they were drilling down to see how far they had to go. And there we have them! ‘What would we do with them?’ ‘Oh I’ll put them my yard,’ Smoke would say.” As we looked out the window, Patricia pointed to other objects in the yard. “There’s a big metal wheel there, that came from the woolen mills. And I used to have some stuff out in the side yard. Oh, my husband!” Old objects taken from the mill are now associated with not only the woolen mill, but also with memories of her husband, her family, and their home.
When talking of her home and her and her husband’s time at the woolen mill, it is not only objects around the house that remind her of the mill, but the house itself. “The mill bought us this house,” she would say on more than one interview. Her yard, her house, and many objects within her home collectively represent Patricia’s time as a Pendleton Woolen Mills weaver. Together, they are hers and her husband’s tangible signature on the Pendleton landscape.

The City of Pendleton

According to the 2010 Census, Pendleton’s population was 16,653. It is a small city where it is relatively easy to find connections between one’s friends and families and other local residents. Patricia said, “A town this size, you know,” in regards to occasionally running into former mill employees or their families. She said sometimes she goes to Denny’s to eat with friends, and it is not uncommon to see one man in there who used to work at the mill.

I still see people who used to work there. In fact there’s a man who used to work for my husband. Every time I go in there [Denny’s], he tells me, ‘I used to work for Smoky.’ I say, ‘Yes, I know that.’ And he’ll tell the people at the table, ‘I used to work at the woolen mill and worked for her husband.’

Patricia is active in her community, attends her church regularly, and volunteers at St. Mary’s every week. Her time at the woolen mill is sometimes a topic of conversation. One instance was when she was at St. Mary’s. She recounted the story.

Mr. Foster was the weave boss before Terry. Yes, Bernard Foster. And I volunteer down here at St. Mary’s every Thursday and his daughter came in. I don’t know how we got to talking about the woolen mill, but I said, ‘I used to work at the woolen mills.’ And she said, ‘What department did you work in?’ And I said, ‘I was a weaver.’ And she said, ‘I bet my dad was your boss.’ And I said, ‘Was your dad Bernard Foster?’ And she said, ‘Yes!’
Patricia and Mr. Foster’s daughter were able to connect and share each of their memories of the woolen mill and Mr. Foster. Interactions with other community members allows for Patricia and other woolen mill employees to connect to Pendleton’s larger urban narrative.

For Patricia who worked at the Pendleton woolen mill for 32 years, there are reminders throughout the town of her time at the mill. She sees and experiences things and places in town differently than someone who never worked at the mill. The homes of friends who she or her husband worked with, restaurants where the company hosted events, parks where picnics took place, signs advertising the mill, and simply people wearing Pendleton Woolen Mills products all connect Patricia to the mill. For Patricia, Pendleton Woolen Mills has shaped her and her view of the town. Pendleton is filled with reminders, memories, and experiences that connect her to her years spent as a weaver for the local mill.

Conclusion

Pendleton Woolen Mills is part of the fabric of the Pendleton community. From the city’s earlier days to the present, Pendleton Woolen Mills has been a visible part of the community. The focus and impact of the mill, however, have changed. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the mill was seen as a vital industry to the community. The mill had a relatively large payroll, and it was a sign of progress in the quest to become an industrial city. In the twenty-first century, the mill’s payroll is not vital to Pendleton’s economy. The mill, does, however, bring in thousands of tourists
each year. John Boston, the Pendleton plant manager, estimated that each year, 14,000 – 16,000 people go on one of the company’s woolen mill tours (personal communication, August 12, 2014). Outsiders recognize the mill as a unique part of Pendleton, and many of the tourists that visit each year, have their own personal “Pendleton story” that connects them to Pendleton Woolen Mills. The Chamber of Commerce is also working to brand Pendleton as a “handmade, local” community, and Pendleton Woolen Mills fits their branding strategy.

In addition to the mill playing a role in Pendleton’s place identity, the Pendleton Woolen Mills Company has played a significant role in marketing themselves and using their history, traditions, and heritage to successfully brand themselves with a western identity. From the beginning, the company has used the concept of place and heritage to brand themselves. Advertising campaigns, educational materials, promotional stories, and their products are all based on an aspect of place and heritage. The company has served as a key in shaping both a Northwestern place identity and a company identity.

There have been several different actors in shaping Pendleton’s place identity. The company, its local Pendleton employees, the city of Pendleton, and the local newspaper have all played various roles since the first Pendleton Woolen Mills opened in 1896. In the past, the local newspaper and employees, as well as the city and company, were considerable agents in Pendleton’s identity as a woolen mill town. In more recent years, the city and company have become the more influential shapers of Pendleton’s woolen mill identity. While many locals still view Pendleton Woolen Mills as part of their community’s identity, the city and company have focused much of their marketing
and promotional attention on bringing in tourists and shaping the perceptions of outsiders. As a result, outsiders and locals alike now play a role in shaping part of Pendleton’s place identity as one of a “woolen mill town.”
While sheep ranching is no longer a common western activity, it has left enduring legacies in many places across the West. This legacy has been nurtured in diverse ways, by personal stories and the sharing of social memories, in public art, the vernacular landscape, in events and celebrations, and in institutions such as local newspapers and museums. The legacy that is remembered in each case study reveals only parts of the actual sheep ranching historical narrative. The past in its fullness is rarely remembered factually when it is based only on memories (Lowenthal 1975). Despite this, aspects of the past, which includes communities built around sheep ranching and creating woolen blankets at the local mill, are still the foundation for today’s place identities in the communities studied.

Legacies can also be obliterated and that process has obscured place identities connected with sheep. The American West is rapidly changing. Communities are growing and economies are diversifying. Lifestyles are changing, and traditions are not always carried on. These changes are part of the reason that place identities associated with sheep ranching or the wool business can become lost over time.

Further, many sheep ranching stories have simply not been told or embedded in communities’ narratives. The American West is filled with stories, both known and unknown. Sheep ranching was once a dominant activity throughout the West and is part of the region’s narrative. The stories that surround the industry and its traditions, however, have not been told as often as stories about cowboy culture. Western author, Ivan Doig, said,
You bet I’m writing against the cowboy myth. The West was settled by a hell of a lot of people, different kinds of people…and the guy out herding cows was pretty minimal among them in most cases. So I find it bizarre that the cowboy is the emblematic Western figure that so much potboiling fiction has made him… The sheep culture seems to me a rich topic which hasn’t had all that much written about it, even though I think it’s a more complex agricultural way of life (Morris 1994, 69-70).

The sheepherder and sheep rancher was not perceived as a glamorous occupation. Perkins (1992) discusses the antipathy cattlemen had for sheep and the reasons. Some of it was economic self-interest as they were both competing for forage on the open ranges. Perkins also suggests authors, such as John Taylor of Caroline and his book, *Araotr*, with a widespread readership had an important role to play in the negative perceptions of sheep. Taylor’s book and arguments against sheep may have transferred with people as they moved further west. The sheepherder was also low on the economic and social ladder. Often, they were foreigners. They lived alone with the animals and did not see other people. Milan DeRuwe (2002) reminisced about his time as a sheepherder and noted that for five years, he made no friends, and did not have a single date or vacation. While the industry may have had unglamorous aspects to it, it nonetheless was a considerable part of shaping the American West, and the stories associated with the industry are worth exploring.

Within the sheep ranching narrative there are many stories. There are stories of herders, shearing crews, and ranch owners. Men and women were both involved, but often in different ways. As a result, they, too, have different stories attached to the business and the larger sheep culture. This dissertation presented some of the stories. It focused on the stories of the “gatekeepers” in the community, because it is their stories
that have contributed most significantly to place identities in the twenty-first century so far. Many times, the stories told were of the positive impact the industry had on places. Undoubtedly, there are other stories that include environmental degradation, the exploitation of labor, commodification of Native American traditions and beliefs, and the tension between sheep ranchers and the government. Those stories are not told as frequently, if at all, by the communities in my case studies. For future research, however, they, too, deserve to be explored and told for they are part of the past.

Exploring three different western places allowed me to understand not only the enduring legacies in each locality, but also how the legacies of the sheep industry have appeared in western communities in different ways. The use of three locations was also a way to see how that legacy was manifest in different ways at each locality. I utilized multiple methods and sources for exploring place identity including landscape analysis, interviews with community members and families, participating in community events, and investigating various media and archival sources. Each of these approaches offered different ways of knowing and measuring place identity. By assessing the concept of place identity from varied perspectives and varied sources in three different localities, this dissertation provides a meaningful methodology for examining the ways place identities are created, nurtured, and reflected at multiple scales and in a diversity of communities.
Reading the cultural landscape was central to this dissertation in all three case studies. The landscape provided a visual lens into the ways place identity is expressed in the communities. I found that the landscape in each community was inscribed with ways of seeing and understanding the past, which then contributed to shaping contemporary place identity (Alexander 2009; Robertson 2006; Post 2013). Everyday landscape features from the past, such as vernacular buildings and working landscapes held meaning for individuals and played a role in creating place identities (Wheeler 2014). More contemporary landscape features such as public art also lent insights into community heritage (Arreola 1984).

The sheep and wool industries have shaped both rural and urban landscapes across the American West. Some of the landscapes remain working landscapes, providing a livelihood for sheep ranchers and mill workers. Other landscapes act more as visual expressions of shared heritage that contribute to memories of sheep herding, long, sweaty hours of stomping wool, or more broadly, to the community’s sense of its common past.

The landscapes in each case study manifest this legacy in different ways, shaped by their distinctive environmental settings and by their unique settlement histories. Because of the cohesiveness of the Sweet Grass sheep ranching community, Big Timber’s urban landscape reflects the sheep ranching heritage in a number of ways including public art, the school mascot, signatures on the wool warehouse, and cemetery headstones. Public art, such as the mural and sculpture, promote community pride, enhance community identity, and capture lost landscapes and former ways of life.
(Francaviglia 1991; Smith, J. 2002). The mural, however, only captures idyllic aspects of former sheep ranching scenes, which can alter people’s views and memories of the past and make them “tidy and suitable” (Lowenthal 1975, 28). Yet, as Lowenthal (1975) suggested, although some undesired scenes may be eliminated from memory, the way the past is presented shows Big Timber’s current interests, such as the desire to highlight the variety of ways the sheep industry has been a part of the community for over a century.

Historic and significant buildings, such as the wool warehouse, also enhance community identity and remind locals of stories from everyday life in the past (Harven and Langenbach 1981). Names on the wall have the power to elicit both positive and negative memories about people and their sheep ranching practices. The building serves as a reminder of the hard work community members have engaged in for over a century. It also reminds individuals of how different the industry is in the twenty-first century compared to the early twentieth century when the building was filled with wool.

Big Timber’s landscape features reflect a community-wide appreciation for sheep ranching traditions and create a strong place identity associated with those traditions. Rural landscapes were also shaped by the Sweet Grass sheep industry. Rather than commemorative features, the rural landscape signatures remain a part of the working landscape. Woven-wire sheep fences, lambing sheds, sheep pastures, and historical sheep routes known by current and former sheep ranchers all reflect a place deeply shaped by the sheep industry.

The rural and urban sheep landscapes of Elko County reflect a distinct community tradition within a larger population. Sheep ranching in Elko County had strong early roots
in the Basque community. Most Basques did not stay in the business for more than one or two contracts. Most of their prominent signatures on both the urban and rural landscape are not commemorative in nature, but rather part of the everyday, working landscape. They were created while working or to serve a purpose, and they are a reminder that the landscape is the “product of much sweat, and hardship and earnest thought” (Jackson 1997, 343). Working landscape signatures include the arborglyphs carved by the Basques while herding and camptending in the mountains to help them connect to the larger Basque community. Basques also built boardinghouses in Elko and had annual celebrations and gatherings to create a “home” for the Basque community and the herders who experienced isolation while herding sheep. The boardinghouses that united Basques together were similar to parallel institutions in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, as they “created a place for community and connection” (Hayden 1995, 214). While churches were the social centers for many ethnic communities, the boardinghouses filled that role for Elko’s Basques (Marsh 1987; Hume 2003). Today, these landscapes remain and are vital in linking the Basques to their legacy in the sheep ranching industry. They serve as “icons of identity” (Whelan 2005, 63). Lambing sheds and woven sheep fences are not common in Elko as traditions of sheep ranching in northeastern Nevada differ from those of Sweet Grass. The public domain is relied upon more than private land so sheep fences were not used, and lambing takes place on the range while trailing the sheep. Smaller landscape signatures, such as the transient Basque sheep symbol and the Basque statue in Elko’s City Park, are also important and honor the past, but the arborglyphs and boardinghouses are much more prominent elements in the local landscape.
The landscape signature from the Basques also reflect a group of people who value community. The boardinghouses were an early gathering place for Basques where games, music, and socialization occurred. While the Star Hotel remains a gathering place, the Basque clubhouse also serves as a place for Basques of all ages to gather and celebrate their heritage through dances, music, games, and meals. Additionally, as Mallea-Olaexte (2000) wrote, the arborglyphs served partly as a way for the herders and camp tenders to stay connected to other Basques. Whether today’s Basque-Americans have personal memories of the sheep industry or not, they continue to place value on their community and shape the character of Elko County.

The environmental settings and work routines of the sheep industries in Montana and Nevada also differed. In Montana, the distances covered around Sweet Grass were more limited compared to the distances traveled by Basque herders in northeastern Nevada. Basque herders traveled hundreds of miles annually on foot or horseback, even during the winter months. They experienced both the mountainous terrain and the long, lonesome winters in northern Nevada’s basins. Most Sweet Grass herders did not cross county boundaries. During the winter months, they were either not needed or were not far from other people as sheep were kept close to the home ranch. Because of the isolation Basque herders experienced, some turned to their landscape and experiences in it for inspiration in creating poetry and music, known as *bertsolaritza*. The poetry they created offer insights of the herders’ perceptions of particular landscapes and the way of life they experienced (Gumprecht 1998). Some Basque herders also used their artistic abilities to carve aspen trees that were on their herding routes. While on the job, they could also read
other herders’ tree inscriptions. *Bertsolaritza* and the arborglyphs were two ways herders expressed information about places and their perceptions of landscapes, and as Janet Berlo (2006, 40) suggests, “language and art are particularly important tools by which to make particular locales resonate with deep meanings.”

Pendleton Woolen Mills has also left an enduring signature on the landscape. While the other two case studies have varied landscape imprints, Pendleton Woolen Mills’ most important and conspicuous signature is the Pendleton Woolen Mills building. Other scholars (Hareven and Langenbach 1981; Whelan 2005; Robertson 2006) have also shown the value historic buildings bring to a community by the meanings invested in the buildings and their roles in shaping place identities. Pendleton’s other landscape features are also connected to the building and its imagery. Photos of the mill on wayfinding signage, historical residential neighborhoods for mill workers, and a plaque on a monument are all landscape features that reflect the iconic mill. Pendleton’s wool legacy is centered on the Pendleton woolen mills. The town is not known as a generic “woolen mill town” to many outsiders, but rather, home of Pendleton Woolen Mills.

**Community**

Interviews with community members in each locality provided a lens to understand how place identity is expressed through the community. By working and playing together, sheepmen and women and mill employees form collective memories that then shapes community identity (Starrs 1998; Mansfield 2012). Interviews revealed common stories from locals about their community and its identity. Many of the stories
shared were anchored to a landscape, and these invisible landscapes are part of all three locations (Ryden 1993). Interviews also revealed that the landscapes held more meaning when stories and experiences were associated with them. While the specific memories and experiences associated with the landscape signatures varies in each site, there are similarities, including the themes of hard work, community, and family. Sheepmen and women spent countless hours working with other ranchers and herders, trailing sheep through towns, valleys, and mountains, and eating together as family. Mill employees also spent countless hours working in a different landscape, but still one that is filled with memories of working hard, supporting one another and becoming like family, and carrying on a tradition that has been a part of the community since the early 1900s. The rural and urban landscapes of all three sites hold meaning for those who worked in them.

Based on interviews and published editorials, even those with no experiences working with sheep or wool had stories to tell about memories attached to the landscape, which contributed to a shared sense of the community’s past. Big Timber business owners remember the sheep drives on McLeod Avenue and touring the wool warehouse with friends searching for names. Longtime Elko residents see the Star Hotel and remember all the working Basque shepherders who used to frequent the establishment. Pendleton residents are reminded of their grandmother and her Pendleton collection when they see the mill.

Stories and memories were a substantial part of this research. Many of the community’s social memories were about positive aspects of the distant past, such as the ease of finding herdsmen at the local bars, gatherings of friends and family in Elko County
sheep camps, and the important role of Pendleton Woolen Mills to the community’s early beginnings. As communities have grown, diversified, and their distance has increased from sheep ranching and woolen mill activities, the past becomes more nostalgic (Lowenthal 1975). During interviews, stories of unfair labor practices, tensions between employees and bosses, and the destruction of the environment were rarely mentioned from community members. As Lowenthal (1975, 21) wrote, “No one can remember all of even his own past, but we also selectively forget disagreeable events and scenes.” Conversely, those still actively involved in raising sheep were able to recall more readily the hardships of the industry, such as losing lambs to predators or bad weather, the loneliness of herding sheep, the difficulties of finding knowledgeable help, and the lack of sleep that occurs during lambing season. Memories and stories are selective, and the ones that are shared most frequently among community members contribute more to a place identity.

Distinctive community fabrics played a considerable role in how the sheep industry unfolded in each place and the shaping of place identities. Sweet Grass has primarily been “ranching country” since the settling of Euro-Americans in the late nineteenth century. Big Timber was a community built and sustained by the sheep industry and home to ranchers, herders, shearers, and wool stompers. Shared community experiences and memories were easy to find no matter the job one performed within the sheep industry. Basque herders had a different experience. They were foreigners, performing a job others did not want, and they were often ostracized and segregated. They were far from home and secluded in sage deserts and rugged mountain terrain. They
lived differently and had to build a community in nearby towns, such as Elko, to create a “home away from home.” Because sheep ranching was a significant part of the overall Big Timber lifestyle, sheep ranchers and herders in the Sweet Grass region did not experience the discrimination, harassment, and violence that the first wave of Basque herders did in Nevada.

Communities in both Sweet Grass County and Elko County were also shaped by the seasonal, cyclical dimension of sheep ranching work. Despite the differences in each community, there was a common set of experiences by those who have engaged in the sheep and wool industries. For Elko and Sweet Grass residents, the seasonal cycle of activities united all ranchers, herders, and shearers. Those who worked in the sheep business found common ground and shared similar stories with other sheepmen and women across the West. Certain sheep ranching activities in each place, such as shearing, lambing, or the winter off-season, formed community traditions. Mansfield (2012, 67) also found that sheep working “events have been times of great social gatherings where the bonds of kinship and community are re-centered, forming the traditions” of communities.

The nuances and community responses to the seasonal work, however, differed between the two localities. One of the reasons Basques built boardinghouses was to accommodate the seasonal work cycle. Fewer sheep during the winter months meant fewer herders were needed. Until there was a demand for their work during the spring lambing season, Basque herders found comfort and shelter among other Basques in the
boardinghouse establishments (Echeverria 1999). These former boardinghouses now reflect the Basque legacy and their seasonal work cycles in northeastern Nevada.

In Sweet Grass County, the entire community was impacted by the seasonal work cycles. Shearers, wool stompers, and herders were almost always local residents. Even the youth of the community found temporary work during the wool season. Today, sheep ranching is not as prevalent, but it still shapes the place and impacts the community, particularly during the shearing and lambing seasons. Similar to agricultural economies around the world, for both Sweet Grass and Elko, the rhythms of the sheep ranching year “were encoded in the rural calendar” (Woods et al. 2012, 62).

The community fabric of Pendleton and the mill employees was much different than Basque herders and Montana sheepmen and women. The community workforce of Pendleton Woolen Mills was not as significant in terms of numbers as Montana’s sheep workers, nor were the workers part of an ethnic community as the Basques in Nevada. However, mill employees also sought out community from their fellow workers just as Basque herders and Montana ranchers also sought community from those who had experienced similar circumstances. Hayden (1995) argued for understanding how groups of people have helped shape the history and identity of a place, and the work and experiences of mill workers contributes to the history and identity of Pendleton as home to Pendleton Woolen Mills.

Each community also had their own gendered division of labor, which shaped how men and women experienced each place. These experiences emerged during interviews when individuals shared stories and talked about routines and their roles in
sheep ranching work or factory work. Although there were general patterns of the roles men and women had in their work in each place, similar to what Schackel (2011) found, gender roles were not identical in the three settings I examined.

In Sweet Grass County, gender roles have evolved since World War II. According to locals, in the past, women’s roles were more restricted and home-based. Today, it is common for women to be involved in almost every aspect of the sheep industry. Women can be the primary sheep ranchers or help their spouses with various sheep ranching duties. In addition, they may also take on a more traditional gender role similar to the past, such as providing meals for shearing crews (Harris 1987). Because of their varied work experiences with the industry, I found that men and women shared many similar social memories in Sweet Grass County. The community’s more recent collective memories includes meals with friends and family, shearing with men and women, and lambing during all hours of the day and night. Men and women can both relate to those memories, stories, and experiences.

Traditional Basque gender roles, including gender roles in the western Basque ranching community, were more rigid (Miller 2013). There are examples and stories of women accompanying their husbands on the range to assist with cooking and keeping camp, but Basque women were not sheepherders (Echeverria 1987; Weidel 2001; personal communication, November 21, 2013). Women’s community experiences and social memories revolved around preparing meals for the working men at boardinghouses or at the home ranch (Echeverria 1987; Pecharroman 1998a). Both men and women, however, experienced Basque gatherings, such as the Basque festivals or more informal
gatherings at Basque ranches during the summer months. Archived interviews reveal that Basque women have many memories about summer picnics at ranches or at sheep camps (Pecharroman 1998a; 1998b). Men’s social memories included stories from formal and informal gatherings, but they also reminisced about working in the mountains or the sage deserts.

The gendered division of labor at Pendleton Woolen Mills is also evident. Interviews and Polk Directories revealed that women and men tended to perform different jobs within the mill. Gendered divisions of labor were common in mills, with women working as weavers and spinners and men serving in maintenance and as foremen (Hall et al. 1987). The women I interviewed often spoke about similar memories and emphasized the sense of community they felt with their fellow workers. They talked of their fellow workers feeling like a family. They reminisced about company-wide picnics, but also getting together for lunch in the breakroom on a daily basis. Their sense of community and their personal memories were shaped by their routines and roles within the mill.

Women and men were central to each ranching and mill system in all three locations. Both women and men were needed for the work to succeed. However, many of the images portrayed in each location reflect the role of men (Norton 2000). The murals in Big Timber and Elko depict men out on the range. The Big Timber historical mural does show women spinners, but it does not include other important past roles of women such as caring for burred lambs, cooking meals, or assisting husbands providing provisions to the herders. Basque women were central to the group’s support system for
the work they performed in hotels and their partnerships with their husbands (Echeverria 1987). In Pendleton, one of the iconic images of the mill that includes people is of the male investors standing in front of the mill draped in Pendleton blankets. Reliable women and men laborers, however, were critical figures in the success of the mill. Based on personal interviews and the archived interviews, both the work of men and women are remembered in each community and their social memories. The sheep and mill landscapes in each case study, however, reflect the roles played by men more than women.

The Role of Community Institutions

Place identities are strongly shaped and sustained by local institutions including newspapers, businesses, museums, and cultural centers. Using media sources such as local newspapers added another layer of understanding into how place identities are nurtured and reflected. Community storytelling through a variety of media are powerful means of communicating information and ideas (Holtje 2011). For the small town newspaper, the stories tended to reinforce the community’s heritage (Brown 2006). As the communities become further removed from the industry, the local newspaper has the power to shape memories by printing stories that highlight certain, often nostalgic, aspects of the past.

Newspapers in each of the case studies were historically active in printing sheep and wool related news. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sheep were king in each of the localities, and sheep ranching and wool were vital parts of the economies. When the sheep industry declined after World War II and then again in the
1970s and onward, the local newspapers changed their coverage of the sheep industry, emphasizing its role in defining heritage and place identity. The Big Timber Pioneer in Sweet Grass continues to frequently highlight their sheep ranching heritage. The newspaper has played a central role in bringing awareness to readers about parts of the community’s past and their place identity. Elko’s newspaper, the Elko Daily Free Press, occasionally does as well, especially during the National Basque Festival. These articles also help in sustaining the Basque’s history in the region for younger generations, as Basques in Elko today are no longer engaged in the industry. Pendleton’s paper, the East Oregonian, does not focus as much on the mill in the community, unless it is during a “special” year such as a centennial. Pendleton Woolen Mills is a well-known part of the community. However, the newspaper rarely prints stories connecting the community to that wool or industrial heritage, and instead prints articles that are more business-oriented. Local newspaper articles can tell a reader much about a place, its people, its heritage, and place identities (Burgess and Gold 1985; Brown 2006). Each of the case studies show the different approaches local newspapers use. The material the editors choose to print is a reflection of their community and shows the power newspapers have in shaping social memories and contributing to place identities.

Large, corporate institutions, such as Pendleton Woolen Mills, also have the power to shape place identities. Pendleton, Oregon is the home of the company. Many of the visitors to the mill are there because of a personal “Pendleton story,” such as a family’s tradition of buying an annual Pendleton blanket. To them, Pendleton’s place identity is associated with Pendleton Woolen Mills. The company, however, has extended
their association to include not only the community of Pendleton, but also a more regional, western identity. The company plays a role in shaping perceptions of the American West when they advertise and market their products both nationally and internationally. Images of deserts, mountains, glacial lakes, outdoor adventures such as hiking and camping, romanticized ranching scenes, and the four seasons are all used in their marketing imagery and help shape the West’s place identity as a region where outdoor adventures await. Further, their marketing platform has evolved, and the company utilizes social media to notify consumers and potential consumers. They also invite their customers to be a part of promoting products by encouraging them to post and spread images of Pendleton Woolen Mills’ products. The images are often place-centered and contribute to the company’s western identity.

Producing a Community Heritage

In the latter part of the twentieth century, historical geographers began researching the relationship between heritage and place identity (Baker 2003). Many studies have explored that relationship with a focus on festivals and heritage (Hoelscher and Ostergren 1993; Schnell 2003; Alexander 2009; Zeitler 2009). However, communities embrace and remember their heritage in different ways. In addition to examining the links between festivals and heritage, I explored other ways heritage is remembered, such as through the exchanges of stories and memories, public art, agricultural fairs, marketing campaigns, promotional media sources, and the other roles local institutions can play in defining place identity. Including other perspectives showed the myriad ways in which heritage was remembered and expressed in each community.
Further, participating in community events such as festivals, informal lunch gatherings, shearings, and mill tours allowed me to absorb the “character and personality” of each place and witness first-hand how the communities celebrate their heritage (Schnell et al. 2013, 1). They also allowed me to hear the casual, unprompted sharing of memories between people.

Big Timber has adapted to a dying industry by actively keeping traditions alive and known. Community events, such as public demonstrations at agricultural fairs and parades with sheep-themed floats, bring awareness of the past. Also important to remembering the community’s heritage are community shearing events. While some shearing days are limited to family and friends, other ranchers invite whoever is interested. The local newspaper, the Big Timber Pioneer, also covers different families and their shearing days. Even if locals do not attend an event, the newspaper brings awareness and knowledge of the traditions. Sheep ranching is part of the past, but during shearing season, people are reminded that it is still very much part of the present. Shearing days not only keep traditions alive, but through the sharing of social memories at the events, the past is remembered and place identities reinforced.

Other community features, including Big Timber’s public art and monuments and the local museum’s sheep ranching display, remind people throughout the year that the community was built on the sheep ranching industry. Visitors also see the public features and museum exhibits and learn about the community, which shapes their perceptions of Big Timber’s place identity. The combination of public art and monuments, the museum, shearing events, and fairs play a central role in the community’s enduring place identity.
Elko has grown and diversified and is not a small, cohesive community such as Big Timber. The Basque community within Elko, however, remains connected through a shared heritage. They are an organized community that values their traditions, which is evident at community events and establishments as well as among Basque families. The creation of the National Basque Festival is one way they celebrate their heritage. Ethnic festivals play an important role in celebrating an ethnic identity (Zeitler 2009). The National Basque Festival has changed over time, but its foundation as a gathering and celebration for ranchers in Elko is remembered through printed stories and articles in the festival programs and local newspaper. Local Basque restaurants, such as the Star Hotel, celebrate their Basque heritage and their connections to sheep ranching by printing a local history on their menus, displaying photographs of locals engaging in various sheep ranching activities, and by hosting informal events, such as music during the National Basque Festival and Basque-only lunches. The Star Hotel is not the only local institution that promotes and celebrates a Basque sheep-ranching heritage. Both the Western Folklife Center and the Northeastern Nevada Museum have created exhibits that remember the Basque heritage in northeastern Nevada. The Western Folklife Center reaches a wider western audience, and thus, contributes to informing outsiders of the influence of Basques on the Elko region’s heritage.

The Pendleton Woolen Mills in Pendleton is not seen as an epicenter of the town like it was when it was first built. In the past, the local newspaper, the *East Oregonian*, played a vital role in celebrating and promoting the mill and the community as a “mill town.” Today, the local Chamber of Commerce and the Pendleton Woolen Mills
company are the dominant players in telling and celebrating the Pendleton Woolen Mills story and heritage. The company’s headquarters are in Portland, and they have consumers around the world, but Pendleton Woolen Mills continues to see the value in marketing “place” and their heritage. Pendleton Woolen Mills promotes their company and family heritage in interviews, on their company websites and social media pages, through mill tours, with marketing campaigns, and with their products, particularly their blankets. The Pendleton Chamber of Commerce also uses the mill as a way to promote the distinct character of their community. One way both the Chamber and the company market and promote the mill is through the concept of neolocalism, emphasizing the company’s heritage and that their products are locally made (Schnell 2013). More so than Big Timber and Elko, Pendleton Woolen Mills has expanded their self-promotional campaigns to take advantage of online resources, such as social media and blogs. Pendleton Woolen Mills is a global company, selling and even making some of their products in other countries. Despite this, they continue to promote themselves and their products, particularly their blankets which are made in Pendleton, as a local, or at least, western, company. They reach a wide audience through promotional online content, such as short videos and photographs, that connect consumers to local sheep ranchers, the landscapes they work in to produce quality wool, and their long-standing relationships with the company. Although not as successful as the company, the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce also utilizes social media and online sites to promote the mill as a local tradition and a part of the community’s heritage.
Remembering a heritage through social memories, or collective memories, is also important, particularly in Big Timber and Elko. The stories are a way to remember the community’s heritage and personal identity, as well as make sense of current conditions (Alexander 2009). Although specific memories may differ, the experiences anchored to the landscape are similar, which connects community members and strengthens shared values (Knapp and Fernandez-Gimenez 2008). Big Timber’s collective memories are shared amongst locals informally and also through printed texts, such as newspaper stories and museum exhibits. “Big Timber was built on the sheep industry” is a familiar anecdote and recounted through personal stories and the telling of the community’s history.

Basques in Elko share stories while playing cards and dining at the Star Hotel. Memories are also shared through printed texts, such as menus and festival programs, and through photographs decorating the walls of the Star Hotel. These collective memories focus on positive experiences, such as eating together as family either on the range or in a home. However, there are also the memories of isolating, difficult working conditions that are a more prominent part of the Basques’ collective experiences than they are of Big Timber residents.

Memories of family and hard work are also integral parts of how Pendleton employees recall the past in their community. Many of their memories, however, tend to be more personal as they recall experiences from their own lifetime rather than from collective experiences. Wheeler (2014, 23) defines collective memories as “information and experiences from the group’s collective past [that] are passed down to current
generations.” During interviews and conversations, people talked of their own experiences during their lifetime. Rarely did they bring up stories they had heard about the mill or the history of the company in Pendleton. There was not a sense of community knowledge. The focus on personal memories rather than collective “mill town” memories among employees contributes to a weaker community identity versus what I found in the other two case studies. Collective memories among locals concerning stories about the mill are not a significant part of the community’s narrative.

Place identities connected to a community heritage are more apparent when communities celebrate and promote their heritage in multiple ways, such as through a combination of annual festivals and perennial landscape signatures (Frenkel and Walton 2000; Schnell 2003; Alexander 2009). At gatherings, such as festivals and local events, the sharing of social memories also contributes to a greater sense of community and group identity (Alexander 2009). With multiple reminders of a community’s heritage, locals are made more aware of their past and can more readily answer and agree upon the story the town tells itself (Marsh 1987).

Family

Repeated interviews with a family in each case study offered a more intimate perspective of the impact sheep ranching and mill work has had on families. Knight et al. (2002, xiv) suggest that those engaged in ranching have a “strong sense of family and of belonging to a place.” Through interviews and time spent with the families, a “belonging to place” was apparent in all three families. Focusing on a family in each case study
provided information about individuals, their sense of place and belonging, their roles in sheep ranching and mill work, and the invisible landscapes they have because of their work. This research methodology of delving into family and individual stories showed that despite the differences of the work in each place, each family has been shaped by their work. It is reflected in their homes, conversations, community interactions, and invisible landscapes. Each family had “tangible reminders, or stories of the past” connected to the landscapes in which they lived and worked (Knapp and Fernandez-Gimenez 2008, 151).

While the community’s social memories tended to be more nostalgic, family interviews revealed more of the hardships of sheep ranching and working in the woolen mill. Repeated interviews with the families in each case study not only created more trust, but we were able to have more candid conversations with one another. Further, for the families in Sweet Grass and Elko, repeated trips to their pastures, lambing sheds, and grazing allotments reminded them of the positive and negative realities of the industry, both in the past and the present.

Repeated interviews with the ranching families in Sweet Grass and Elko also revealed the role that multi-generational ranching has on families and their sense of place and belonging. As Knapp and Fernandez-Gimenez (2008, 151) also found, “the land and the work are often deeply identified with departed relatives.” Both families frequently reminisced of working with sheep with their parents or grandparents. A particular landscape would remind them of certain family traditions and connect them to the work of their relatives.
An in-depth exploration of a mill family also revealed a sense of connection with the work of departed relatives. There was not a long line of family members engaged in mill work for extended periods of time, but memories of a father-in-law, husband, and daughter working at the mill were part of Patricia Heathman’s stories and identification with the mill. Although a different setting, interviewing a family with multiple people who have worked at the mill showed that mill work also shaped their identity and sense of connection to the community. Similar to the ranching families, themes of hard work, pride in the work, family involvement, and a sense of belonging to the place and community as a result of the years working were also present in Patricia’s stories and experiences.

**Creative Works: Films and Place Identities**

Widely viewed media sources such as films have the power to shape outsider perceptions of a place when they tell stories about places and the people who live in them. Films were part of each location’s attempts to preserve and bring awareness of the past. Films reflect general cultural attitudes as well as shape the way an audience perceives a place (Aitken and Zonn 1994; Hausladen 2006). They also provide a visual for the way of life in communities and the differences in places (McHugh 2005).

In all three locations, the purpose behind the films created about the local sheep and wool industries are commemorative in nature. They were created to celebrate the past and the people involved in the industries. The Sweet Grass (*Sweetgrass*) and Elko (*Amerikanuak*) films, however, were also created to capture aspects of the local traditions
before they completely disappeared. *Sweetgrass* covers the last Big Timber family to trail sheep into the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. *Amerikanauk* tells the story of a disappearing way of life and features the lives of Basque shepherders, efforts to sustain Basque culture in the region, and the importance of community amongst the Basques. In both projects, non-local film-makers directed and produced the film, but they worked closely with local residents to tell their stories to accurately portray life in each place.

Films about Pendleton Woolen Mills were produced by the company. They are short promotional films about longstanding relationships with their woolgrowers, the Bishop family heritage, and the origins of Pendleton Woolen Mills in northeastern Oregon. Similar to the Elko and Sweet Grass films, Pendleton’s videos inform and entertain viewers. Some themes in the videos, including community, place, and traditions, are also similar to the other two locations. For the most part, the Pendleton films are targeted to potential consumers, and the videos are not feature-length productions. The main goal is not to tell the story of a disappearing way of life. Rather, the videos tell short stories that are part of the company’s collective memories. Through other means, such as print advertisements and mill tours, Pendleton Woolen Mills has been telling stories of their relationships with Native Americans and local woolgrowers, their family heritage, and the history of the community’s involvement for years. In the twenty-first century, the company has used short films to tell these stories and reach a wider audience online. The stories told in the videos can then become well-known among brand followers and part of their collective memories about the Pendleton Woolen Mills.
All the films also use the landscape to tell their stories in the films. Nevada’s sometimes cold and harsh landscapes, the Star Hotel’s interior landscape, and the stories of herders and a way of life in northeastern Nevada that is disappearing were all part of the images portrayed in *Amerikanuak*. The producers of *Sweetgrass* highlighted similar images in Montana, including the mountainous landscapes of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, the everyday working landscapes of the home ranch, and the stories of family traditions in Sweet Grass County. Not all of the videos produced by Pendleton Woolen Mills used landscapes to help tell their stories. The ones that did, such as “Pendleton Heritage Umatilla Wool” (Pendleton Woolen Mills 2015) and “Celebrating America’s Treasures with the #pendle10park Explorers” (Pendleton Woolen Mills 2016), also emphasized family traditions, the West’s landscapes, and an outdoors way of life. These visual media sources produced in each case study help shape place identities (Wyckoff 2014a).

While length, story-line, and specifics differ, all of the films and videos bring awareness to local traditions. Although portrayed differently in each video, all of them do show a sense of community through place-based relationships with families, friends, and workers. The relationships and local traditions depicted shape perceptions about each place and play a role in shaping place identities.

**Enduring Place Identities**

By examining three different case studies, this dissertation shows how cultural and geographical settings need to be set in context to understand places and place
identities. An industry does not unfold and impact different places and people in identical ways. Factors including the physical environment, local economies, key players and image makers, cultural backgrounds, and defining institutions of communities all play a role in shaping place identities.

The communities in each case study are all different in terms of main economic drivers, population, and history. Sweet Grass County is a more homogenous community in terms of economy and people making it easier to keep community traditions alive. Ranching continues to be a significant part of the community, highlighted in the newspaper, talked about over coffee, and impacting the seasonal workflow of residents. While cattle ranches are more prevalent, sheep ranching remains, and as residents are aware, “Most of the ranches here were bought and paid for with sheep.”

Elko and the surrounding towns have experienced considerable growth since 1990 because of the mining industry. The population of Elko County has gone from just under 14,000 in 1970 to almost 52,000 people in 2015. With an influx of people, it can be more difficult for an entire town to connect with the community’s heritage and identity. Despite that, the local Basques are aware of their local history and impact on the place. They have been a part of the Elko community since the late nineteenth century, and therefore, their heritage has become embedded within Elko’s place identity. Basques used to be synonymous with sheep in the American West (Douglass and Bilbao 1975; Reig 2010). Today, that association remains for many people and places. Urban places may become known for specific ethnic groups, and the social institutions and businesses will reflect the ethnic identity of the community (Arreola 1995; Robertson 2006). For
Basques, it is not only the past that shaped Elko, but the cohesive Basque community that remains maintains many of their Basque and western traditions. The Star Hotel and the Basque Clubhouse act as functional and symbolic social nodes for local and non-local Basques (Arreola 2002). Sheep ranching is part of the Basque-American heritage, and through social memories, events, and photos, the stories of that heritage are passed down.

Similar to the Elko region, Pendleton, is also no longer a small, cohesive community. There are many economic drivers other than Pendleton Woolen Mills. The community is aware of Pendleton Woolen Mills, and in some cases even prideful of the mill, its history, and its recognition, but there lacks a large, visible imprint of the workers themselves. Many Pendleton residents even identify their town more as a rodeo town than a Pendleton Woolen Mills town. As in Elko, however, Pendleton Woolen Mills has been a large part of the community for over 100 years, and the identity of Pendleton as home to Pendleton Woolen Mills has been engrained in part of the community’s identity. The company and Pendleton Chamber of Commerce also play a considerable role as they market and promote Pendleton Woolen Mills, and consequently, shape the perceptions of many outsiders. Use of the iconic mill building in advertisements, promotional videos about the mill and local sheep ranchers, and widely-circulated interviews with the family all support Pendleton’s place identity as home of Pendleton Woolen Mills.

Community identification with its past is much stronger in Big Timber and within the Basque community than it is in Pendleton. Sheep ranching and herding answer Ben Marsh’s (1987) question, “Why are we here?” for Sweet Grass residents and Basques in Elko County. Without sheep ranching, Sweet Grass would be a different community. It
was built on the sheep industry as so many locals recount. Similarly, the Basques migrated to the deserts of Nevada to herd sheep. They are “here” because of their involvement in the industry as herders, ranchers, and boardinghouse employees. For Pendleton employees, working at the mill does not answer Marsh’s question. Those interviewed did not move to Pendleton to work at the mill, but rather, they already lived in Pendleton and then found employment at the factory. Mill workers created their own community and supported one another, but larger institutions, such as the newspaper early on, the company, and more recently, the Chamber of Commerce, have played a stronger role in bringing awareness about the Pendleton mill and thus shaping the community’s identity.

Sheep and wool were foundational in each of the communities at one time, and the past is not completely forgotten. For all sites, part of the past is still continuously lived. Sheep ranching continues in Big Timber. The Star Hotel continues to be a gathering place for Basques. Pendleton’s mill continues to churn out woolen blankets. Despite changing circumstances in all three locations, place identities connected to a sheep and wool heritage have to some extent remained. These place identities have endured because enough people in each community believed in preserving aspects of the past in varied, often complementary ways. Circumstances will continue to change in each community, and if sheep and wool place identities are to endure, communities will need to feel the desire to continue to embrace their place-based heritages.
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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRES
Questionnaire for Community Members

Date: 
Name of Interviewee: 
Location of Interview: 
Gender: Age: 
_______ Prefers to remain anonymous in any publications/presentations 
Do not include name on questionnaire Code: ____________________

1. How long have you lived here (Sweet Grass, Elko County)?

2. How were/are you involved in the sheep industry?

3. How have you seen the sheep industry evolve/change here?
   a. Why do you think it has changed?

4. What do you think the future of sheeping here is?
   a. Do you think the sheeping heritage and the memories and stories of it will remain?

5. How do you see ranchers adapting to the changing sheep industry?

6. Describe community involvement in the past and now (shearing crews, sheep passing through town, etc.).

7. Does your community have any events either directly or as a side aspect celebrating the sheeping past (festivals, parades with sheeping floats, county fairs, etc.)?

8. How aware do you think the community is of the sheeping past?

9. Depending on person’s position: Can you describe a typical lambing season when you were a child? Today? A typical shearing seasons then and now? A typical “moving” day(s) then and now?

10. Are there any significant landscape features associated with the sheeping past or present?
   a. What meanings/memories do they hold?
Questionnaire for Sheep Ranching Families

Date: 
Name of Interviewee: 
Location of Interview: 
Gender: 
Age: 
Prefer to remain anonymous in any publications/presentations 
Do not include name on questionnaire 
Code: 

1. How long has your family been in this area? Where did the first settlers in your family come from? Were they ranchers? How did they learn to ranch?

2. Why did you decide to continue ranching?

3. Can you describe a typical lambing season when you were a child? Today? A typical shearing seasons then and now? A typical “moving” day(s) then and now? Annual seasons of work?
   a. Who helps you with these various rounds of activities? Migrant workers? Locals? Family? All of the above? Has this changed since you were a child? How so?

4. How is your approach different from previous operations on this property? What do you do differently from your parents and grandparents? How have you had to adapt to the changing sheep industry?

5. What do you think makes ranching here special or different from other ranching areas in the West?

6. Can you ever see yourself selling all of your sheep? Why/why not?

7. How does each family member help with raising sheep? Are there certain roles? Has this changed?

8. How do you find your herders today? How has that changed?

9. What is it about sheep ranching that you love? Or loathe?

10. Can you tell the difference between lands used/grazed for cattle or sheep?
   a. If so, what are the differences/similarities?

11. Are there any significant landscape features associated with the sheepling past or present?
   a. What meanings/memories do they hold?
Questionnaire for PWM employees

Date:
Name of Interviewee:
Location of Interview:
Gender: Age:
_______ Prefers to remain anonymous in any publications/presentations
Do not include name on questionnaire Code: ____________________

1. What years did you work at the mill?
2. What is/was your role in the mill?
3. Did you grow up in this area? If not, did you move here to work at the mill?
4. Can you describe a typical day at the mill when you first began? Today?
5. How did automation affect the work?
6. What role do you see the mill playing in the community?
7. Do you think the community as a whole knows the history of the mill? Do you think it is important to the community to keep the mill operating in Pendleton?
8. Do you go to the mill anymore? When you see the mill or Pendleton products, do memories of working there or friends from the mill come up?
9. If something were to happen to the mill, such as it shutting down or being torn down, how would you feel? How do you think the town would feel?
10. Is there “community” among current/past employees? Do people stay in touch?
11. Are there any employee/company gatherings? Are they well attended? Has this changed?
12. Was there ever any neighborhood that mill employees tended to live?
13. Do you know anything about PWM baseball or other sport teams? Or card playing gatherings?
14. Do you know of any gatherings of retired workers?
15. Why do you think people work here so long?
16. Was union activity a large part of life for employees?

17. When Pendleton has festivals, parades, celebrations, is there any presence from the PWM?

18. Do you have any strong (either positive or negative) memories associated with working here?

19. What do you feel makes working here special or different from other mill towns in the West?