

IRON, WINE, AND A WOMAN NAMED LUCY:
LANDSCAPES OF MEMORY IN ST. JAMES, MISSOURI

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ABSTRACT

The rural community of St. James, Missouri has experienced moderate growth in recent times. The town's location offers both opportunities for and obstacles to economic and human development, and its history provides a unique source for a modern tourism and retail economy. The research presented here explores sense of place in St. James by examining place perceptions and attachments among residents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted within a stratified sample of 27 individuals to explore the individual and collective memories, perceptions, and lived experiences that contribute to the residents' sense of place. This lived reality is posited against the "official vision" of St. James – the image presented by tourism, government, development and official history – to explore the question of authenticity on the landscape. The lived reality offers three alternate landscapes of St. James. "St. James as palimpsest" presents a landscape built on memory, legacy, pride and change. "St. James as Mayberry" presents a landscape based on quality of life, place attachment, civic obligation and the outside perspective. "St. James as cruisescape" presents a landscape built on young adult memories of childhood and teenage years lived in the town, the natural setting of the town, and visions of the future. An additional element to this research concerns the issue of reflexivity in ethnographic research: the investigator grew up in St. James but has been away for many years, making him neither a true insider nor outsider. The research concludes with an assessment of the situation of small Midwestern towns at the brink of the twenty-first century.