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The (loess) hills:
Power and democracy in a “new” landform

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Sociology

Major Professor: Michael M. Bell

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

1999

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To individually acknowledge all those who have helped get me to this point, the last pages I will write of my dissertation, would be to (almost) write a dissertation length paper once again. And so I apologize for the generalizations I am about to make, but sincerely hope that those who have helped me maintain some semblance of sanity these past three years know who they are.

First and foremost, I thank those individuals from the hills, no matter where they “actually” live, who opened up their homes and their world, and shared many hours of conversation with me. My intention was to represent your voices correctly, and well. I hope I have done so. I also hope that in the places where I appear critical, my criticism is taken in the way in which it is intended, from one friend to another. So to all “Hill People”—wherever you are located—*Thank you!*

There are several individuals who deserve specific mention. These include my major professor and friend, Mike Bell, and my employer and friend, Steve Padgitt. I am quite proud to say I am a student of Mike Bell’s (in fact at times I flaunt it). Mike has not only accepted my unconventional ways but encourages them. He has patiently sat, listened, and offered advice for hours while I muddle not only through thoughts of analysis but also thoughts on life. Steve Padgitt as well has accepted my unconventional ways, and has wholeheartedly supported me through this venture. The importance Steve places on students first, and their research assistantship duties second is exemplary, as is the trust he has placed in me, and the opportunities he has given me these past 5+ years. Every graduate student should be so lucky to work with Mike and Steve.

Everyone would also do well to have friends like Joan Steffen-Baker, Renea Miller, Wendy Wintersteen, and Robert Waggoner. Without Renea and Joan I’d still be mired in transcribing of tapes and sitting at the computer trying to figure out why my page numbers aren’t centered. These two helped me in the less exciting work in this piece, but their work builds the foundation of it. Wendy and Robert have given me nutritional support by often providing me dinner, but also personal support, with their continuous encouragement for me to follow my heart, and my dreams.

I apologize to those who had hoped to see their names on the following pages. Time did not permit me to verify with everyone how I used their comments. In my future revisions, I hope to use real names, to tell the story most accurately. Here I would like to personally thank those who made my stay and work in the hills never seem like work. These include; Mary Jane, Thayer and Eric Brown, Tom and Shirley Bruegger, Denny and Janelle Thoreson, Jeanne Kuhlmann, Sheila Lindsey, Wilbur and Leone Mann, Chris Miller, Thelma Miller, Walter and Mary Ordway, Ruth Pickle, Colleen Shol, Ardith Sporleder, Electa Strub, Ivan Struble, former and present members of the Loess Hills Hospitality Association Board, and “the gang” at the Waterin’ Hole.

I wrote my dissertation in a manner to open up the discourse of sociology. Some will argue that it is not “scientific”—and in the conventional sense of the word I agree. Yet “science” in that conventional sense at times erects boundaries, when my attempt throughout this work is to tear some boundaries down. For those who were willing to accept this different way of “doing science,” I sincerely thank you. These include my additional committee members, Jackie Litt, Pete Korsching, Clare Hinrichs, and Mark Chidister. Their insightful comments on this work already have my mind reeling about the direction I will take this dissertation into its final product.

Finally, thanks to all my friends in East Hall and Ames, as well as my family, who understood when I disappeared for long periods of time. In the following pages, I hope to finally answer your question, “what is she doing out in that farmhouse anyway?”

Without any of these above individuals, I honestly don’t know how or if this work would have been completed. I have been truly blessed to have encountered so many wonderful people. Thank you all.

ABSTRACT

In the 1970's a new landform appeared in western Iowa—the "Loess Hills." The hills were there before, but scientists, primarily geologists, were the first to give these landscape features this specific name and document their boundaries. These hills, said the scientists, are significant because they are one of only a few landforms in the world made wholly of wind-blown glacial deposits, called loess, which were left after the last ice age ended millennia ago. Until the late 1980's and early 1990's, most residents in the area called the area "the bluffs" or "the hills." Yet use of the new name is on the increase with each year.

The primary goal of my research was to study this collective space called the Loess Hills, searching an answer to the question: When proclamations are made by natural scientists and the constitution of a place occurs, what are the social consequences? With the new name—a purely scientific name—a new array of social dynamics has emerged within the area. Identifying these dynamics, and the larger social processes which have occurred during and with this name change, are the principal issues I examine, using ethnographic research.

The principal dynamics stem from the interactions between external actors (scientists, journalists, tourists, and the State) and the residents of the region. Issues of power and democracy have emerged from these interactions. Residents are now grappling with the scientific facts surrounding the hills. A change in collective identity, from "hill people" to "Hill People" has also arisen. There is an increased identification and pride now associated with the landform. Tension over "ownership" of the landform has resulted in redrawing and establishment of social boundaries—boundaries which were not there (nor were they a question) before the name "Loess Hills" was taken on. Particularly significant in this work is the role of power, science, and the interplay of internal and external definitions in the social shaping of the hills, and the implications of this interplay for democracy.

1

I

PACKING FOR THE TRIP



ONE

SETTING THE BOUNDARIES

In the summer of 1973, our family (nine of us) loaded the station wagon and headed westward. We were going to Colorado, to see the mountains. I had never seen them in *real* life, but knew they were *BIG*, and beautiful. As we drove from our home in Cedar Rapids, located in Eastern Iowa, to central and Western Iowa (yet uncharted parts for me) I saw them...the mountains. I was a bit surprised we could still reach them before lunchtime, having just left that July morning. And I was more surprised as we drove towards the obviously different landscape from that which we'd been experiencing for hours, for I heard no excited "There they are!" We drove through them, past them and continued on, while Dad mentioned that we were just "now leaving Iowa." I was confused.

I realize now what I saw then are what some do indeed call mountains, albeit "miniature ones." These "miniature mountains" are the "Loess Hills." Scientists, primarily geologists, were the first to give these landscape features this specific name and document their boundaries. These hills, said the scientists, are significant because they are one of only a few landforms in the world made wholly of wind-blown glacial deposits, called loess, which were left after the last ice age ended millennia ago. This landform runs through seven counties in Iowa, from Plymouth County in Northwest Iowa through Fremont County in Southwest Iowa, continuing into Missouri.¹ The boundaries from east to west are arbitrary² but are commonly cited as being a narrow band, between 15 to 30 miles wide (Figure 1).

The name "Loess Hills," is a relatively new name and the degree to which it's been adopted among individuals varies greatly. Until the late 1980's and early 1990's, most residents in the area called the area "the bluffs" or "the hills," and, when talking amongst themselves, many still do.³ Yet use of the new name is on the increase with each year.

Various state agencies have established programs to enhance tourism, economic development and environmental protection in the area now known as the "Loess Hills." The media is also involved, primarily the *Des Moines Register*, which (at the time of this writing

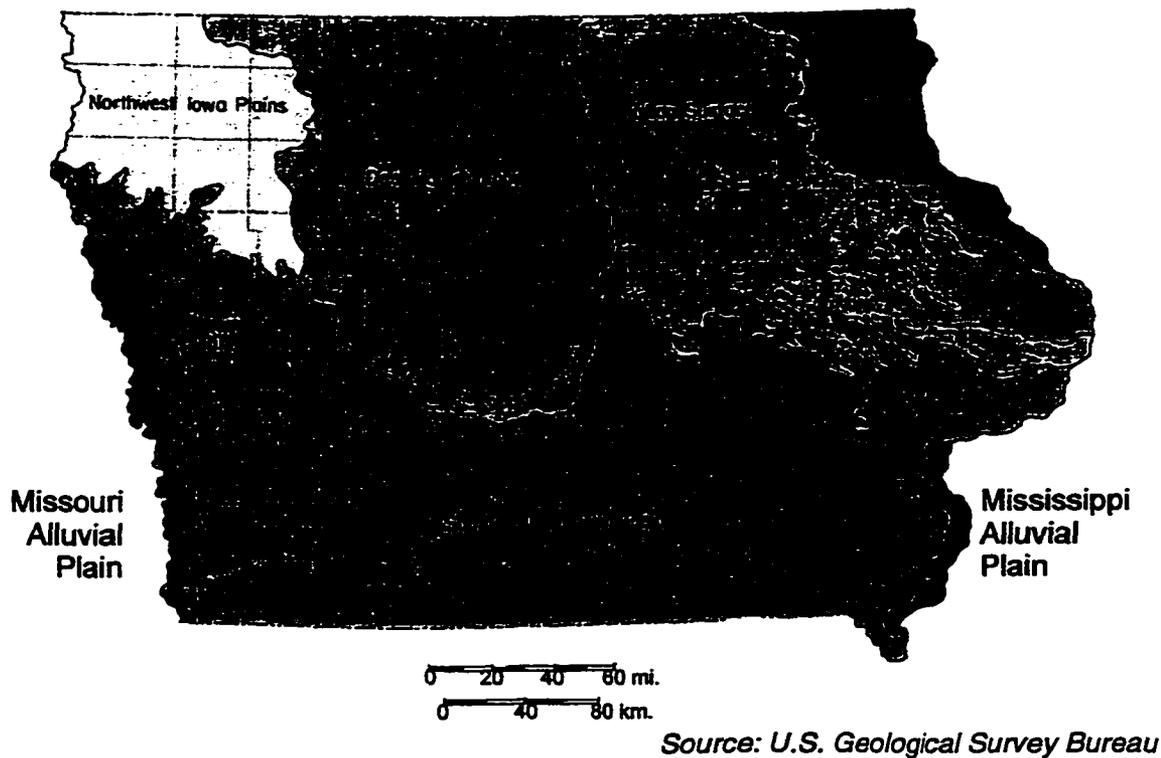


Figure 1. Landforms of Iowa

in 1998 and 1999) is undergoing a crusade for establishment of a “Loess Hills National Park.” Almost weekly, since November of 1997, articles and editorials on this idea have been presented and a vow to not give up until “we run out of ink” has been publicly made by Richard Doak, the editor of the editorial pages.¹ Federal agencies, namely Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development District² and the National Park Service, are also beginning to get involved with establishment of “Loess Hills Communities.” Bruce Babbitt, the Secretary of the Interior, visited the hills in September of 1998 to gain a better view of the area for consideration of National Park status. The Iowa Legislature is also joining in, with the Iowa House passing a bill in March 1999 for creation of the Loess Hills Alliance, a group which will “oversee future development and protect property rights.”³

This renaming of the land formation has had consequences for the meaning some residents have given to their place and their social identity. Place, which Linda Lobao has defined as a “distinct social unit and setting within which social relationships transpire”⁴ is a

space which, in the words of Yi-Fu Tuan, serves as “centers of meaning to individuals and to groups.”⁸ We experience place both individually and collectively, and the meaning we gain from these experiences which we attach to a place, often overlap. Collectively, place serves as a “meeting point where sets of social relations intersect.”⁹ That is, place is a collective space which has social boundaries and meaning.

Within these social boundaries, groups create identity, a “sense of association” which is shared with certain others and which distinguishes the group.¹⁰ The meaning given to a place signifies how some individuals collectively identify with it, and the identity they attach to the place. However, this chosen identity may or may not be an agreed upon identity for all in the community. An “agreed upon” identity implies all individuals have a voice *and* their voice has equal representation. We know in reality, however, this is not always the case, either because individuals with a “differing” voice are uninvolved, uninterested, or ignored, through personal choice or other’s design.

In the Loess Hills, the meaning of place and identity is not only being created by individuals within the area (residents) but also those external to the area (tourists, scientists, journalists, employees of the state). Different actors influence these social processes of place creation, meaning, and identity to varying degrees, and this differing influence is often indicative of the power relationships which exist among the diverse groups. Space, within which place is grounded, is, according to the French philosopher Michel Foucault, “fundamental in any exercise of power.”¹¹ As John Urry notes in his discussion on place “different social groups have different stakes in a place, and their interests vary from the more obviously material (which itself varies from the straightforwardly ‘economic’ to that of ontological security) to the cultural and aesthetic.”¹² Which groups and whose interests pervade indicate the varying weights of power exercised.

The physical landscape, in this case the Loess Hills, also has a role to play in formation of sense of place and identity, for “actors are bound together in networks that are made up not just of the actors themselves but also of natural entities.”¹³ That is, the hills themselves—the hilltops, their hollows, and the river valleys—are interrelated with the people who live among them. How these individuals live, work and play is affected by their

landform and impacts the meaning and identity they give to, and take from, the landform around them.

The interplay between various social networks and the landform is the basis of what I examine in this dissertation. I base my analysis primarily on the work of Michel Foucault, who made a major contribution to the discussion of power. Foucault, believing that power is everywhere, focuses on the “micro-politics of power” rather than grand structures.¹⁴ A principal concept of Foucault’s work that I apply here is that of power/knowledge. “Power and knowledge directly imply one another,” Foucault writes. “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.”¹⁵

Relations of power/knowledge take place through discourse, “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.”¹⁶ Discourse, according to Foucault, are those “taken for granted structures and habits of thought that dictate what we will take to be true.”¹⁷ Through discourse, subjects are constituted. “Power, knowledge, and discourse are processes,” Foucault states, “that necessarily take place in space.”¹⁸ As science is seen as the “highest form” of knowledge, it is the role science, including social science, plays in space which Foucault is most critical of.

There are a plurality of discourses constituting the landform. In Chapter 2, I introduce those individuals who were involved in the initial discourse, what I call the dominant discourse, that has contributed to constitution of the “Loess Hills.” In Chapter 3 I introduce an additional group whose voices have, for the most part, not been included in the dominant discourse—the residents—and look at what the hills mean to them. In Chapter 4, I consider various sociological issues that have emerged in the area due to the various discourses occurring.

In the region of my research tension exists over what I call “owning the landscape”—not so much owning in a literal sense, but in the right to promote the landscape. This has resulted in redrawing and establishment of social boundaries—boundaries which were not there (nor were they a question) before the name “Loess Hills” was taken on.

In an interview on the theme of geography, Foucault ended by noting the longer he

thought about issues of geography, “the more it seems to me that the formation of discourses need to be analyzed...in terms of tactics and strategies of power...deployed through implantation’s, distributions, demarcation, control of territories and organizations of domains.”¹⁹ Thus, in Chapter 5 I take a closer look at this attempted control of the Loess Hills in terms of who has the “right” to speak for the hills—issues of power and democracy.

The primary goal of my research was to study the constitution of this space called the Loess Hills, searching an answer to the following question: When proclamations are made by natural scientists through discourse, what are the social consequences? With the new name—a purely scientific name—a new array of social dynamics has emerged within the area. Identifying these dynamics, and the larger social processes which have occurred during and with this name change, are the principal issues I examine.

Throughout the dissertation, I consider how I—an outsider—and a social scientist—influence the discourse. By my very being in the hills, and choosing to live there for 11 months, with frequent return visits, I am also saying (both explicitly and implicitly) these hills are something “noteworthy.” I am also constituting the discourse on the Loess Hills.

How I packed

I spent the majority of my time from June 1987 through April 1998 living in the hills in Monona County, conducting ethnographic research in the area. I participated in community events and “hung out” with those who live in the communities and on the farms of the area. I talked with residents, geologists, journalists, tourists, conservationists, state employees and others who have been involved with the hills in some way. I talked with men and women, large farmers and small farmers, those who rely on the hills for their livelihood and those who do not, the young and the less young. The voices I include here are representative of the many voices from those I talked with while residing in and among the hills.

Interviewing allowed me the opportunity to probe as well as clarify answers to my research questions. Some of my interviews occurred in the course of conversations with individuals, while others I scheduled and taped and subsequently transcribed.²⁰ I also conducted documentary analysis of maps, brochures, and signs.

I used an inductive methodological approach where rather than starting with a categorical scheme, I allowed themes to emerge during the research. I linked these themes to the data I gained from my participant observation, conversations, and documentary analysis.

I chose to concentrate on the town of Moorhead and its surrounding area, primarily in Monona County, and somewhat in Harrison County. This area is where adoption of the new name is the most prevalent and where tourism activities have been the most concentrated. I volunteered frequently at the Loess Hills Hospitality Association Visitor's Center, located in Moorhead, and attended the monthly Hospitality Association Board meetings. It is from Moorhead that tours of the hills are planned, phone calls come in inquiring about the hills, and tourists stop for information.

What I have seen so far

In the remainder of this chapter, I briefly present major activities that have and are occurring in the Loess Hills region and introduce the various actors important to the understanding of what is occurring presently in the hills. I also introduce what is to come in the following chapters, setting the boundaries of my dissertation.

The last decade, from 1988 to the present, has seen the most intense focus on the renaming of the hills. The very name, the *Loess Hills*, reveals the primary role science has held in the renaming. Publishing and presenting scientific research on the area has occurred for decades. Bohumil Shimek, an Iowa naturalist first gave the term "loess" to the hills in the late 19th century.²¹ When describing the landform in 1910 Shimek stated (perhaps prophetically), "...whether viewed...in the fall when they are tinted a rusty red by the covering of dry blue-joint grass, or in winter when...they present the aspect of a series of huge snow drifts, they are of unusual interest to the physiographer, the geologist, and the botanist, and they will some day be more fully appreciated."²²

While scientific research has been on-going in this area since the late 1880's, it wasn't until the late 1980's that the term "Loess Hills" began receiving attention among more than just a few individuals outside the fields of biophysical science and conservation. Several publications helped with this. With the 1976 book *A Regional Guide to Iowa Landforms* and the 1991 *Landforms of Iowa* by geologist Jean Prior, came one of the first actual placements

of a boundary on the hills. In 1989 ecologist and scientific historian Connie Mutel wrote the book *Fragile Giants: A Natural History of the Loess Hills*, assisting in the increased recognition of the name.

At this same time, grass roots tourism efforts were beginning in the area. These efforts also played a large role in drawing attention to the region and the new name. With the establishment of the Loess Hills Hospitality Association²³ members began designing scenic by-ways in Monona and Harrison counties, and would promote motorcoach tours throughout the hills, beginning in 1989.

With these local activities, acceptance of the scientists' location of the boundaries began to be more visible. As well as the Loess Hills Hospitality Association, a Loess Hills Cultural Center was established. Both are located in Moorhead, in "the heart of the Loess Hills" as a local tourism brochure proclaims. The county roads in the area have become "The Loess Hills Scenic Byway." There is now a Loess Hills Shaklee Team, the Loess Hills Dozer Service, a Loess Hills Saddle Club, Loess Hills Body Shop (ASE 1-Car Certified), the Loess Hills Historical Society, the Loess Hills Hideaway, and Loess Hills Realty, all "new" to the area in the last five years.

What drew me, an Eastern Iowan, to the hills? Those who live there asked me that frequently. I first heard of the hills in 1994 from my friend Jeff from Denison, located in Crawford County and "in the Loess Hills," he told me. We had planned on conducting a small study of rural tourism in Iowa. I began to read all I could on the region. In May of 1995, we drove out to the area to do some research and to attend the Loess Hills Prairie Seminar.

It was quite a surprise when I drove through the hills on Highway 37 heading west to Onawa, the county seat of Monona County located in the Missouri River Valley. Approaching them a second time, 25 years later, this time I "knew better." My sense of time and space, for better or worse, had changed, and so I knew we weren't quite yet to the mountains. But my confusion was still there, for too quickly I was back on flat ground, looking back at the hills through the rearview mirror as we continued to Onawa. "That was

it?" I asked Jeff. "Those are those hills?" (I had forgotten what they were called, again, and when I did remember, I forgot how to pronounce them.)

Entering Onawa, you see a billboard proclaiming "Widest Main Street in USA Onawa Iowa" and "Home of the Lewis and Clark Festival." The hills can be seen from Onawa, and are about seven miles away. However, one needs to take a picture of them for there are few postcards of the landform in town. The one postcard of the hills has a photo of a local tourist attraction, the Ingemann Danish Church. It's steeple is poking out of the colorful trees adorning the hills in the early fall, with the caption "Fall in the Loess Hills" and underneath "Near Onawa, Iowa" (Figure 2). The proudest looking postcard I encountered in Onawa has a photo of the town's Main Street, with the back noting "The city's main thoroughfare, 150' wide is claimed to be 'the widest main street in the USA'" (Figure 3).

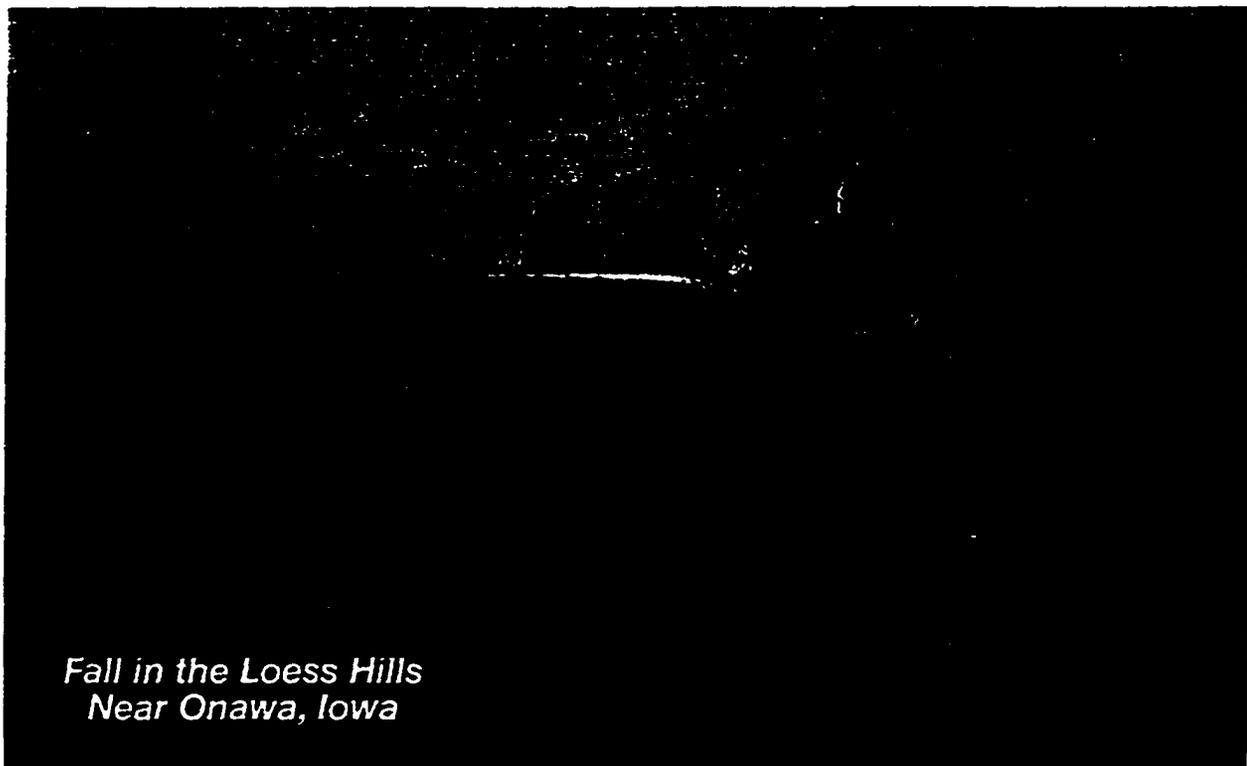


Figure 2. Fall in the Loess Hills

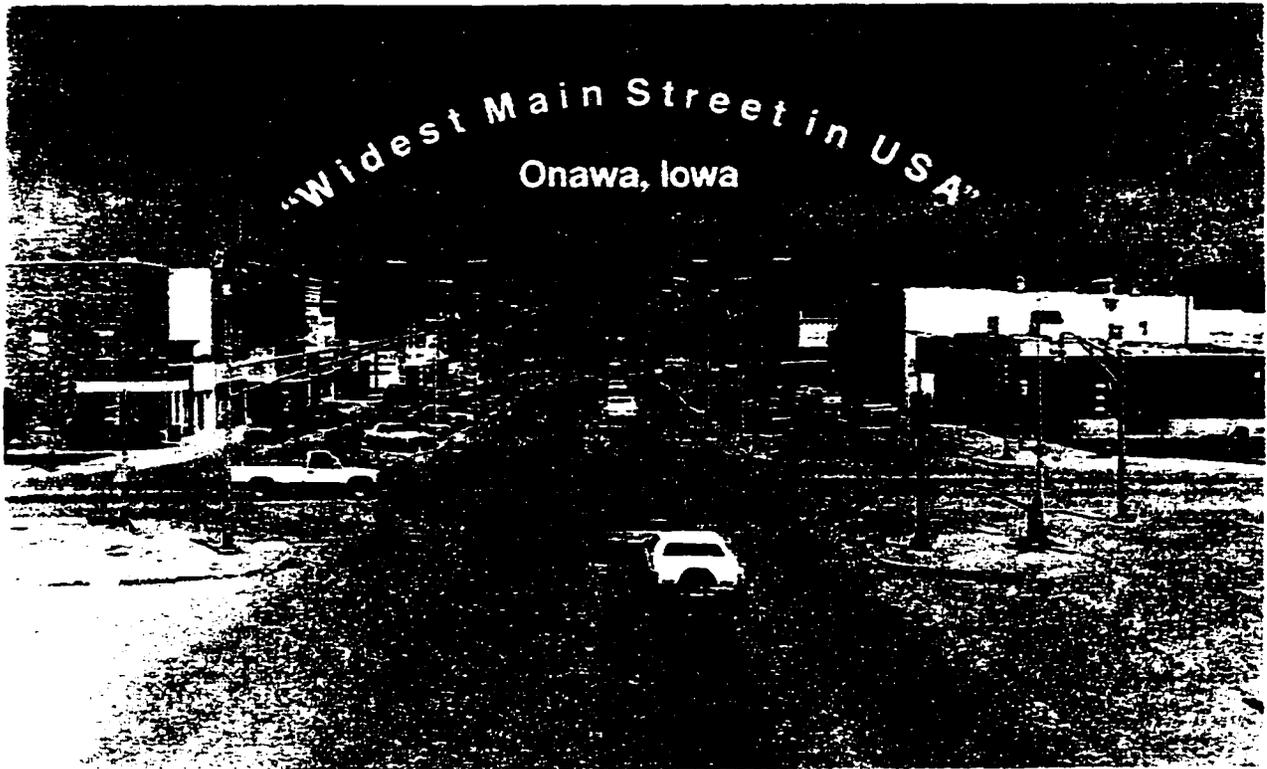


Figure 3. Widest Main Street in USA

My next surprise came during perusal of the local newspapers at the Onawa library, and talking with several of the librarians. While researching the local papers to see what had been written about the hills (virtually nothing) I chatted with Orion, the town historian who was helping me. How did she feel about the hills? “I don’t know, I guess they’re the only ones like them besides some in Japan...or somewhere.”

Later that day as we stood on the front lawn of the Onawa library with the hills in the background, I asked the librarian what she thought of the hills. She told me “There’s a lot of people who come and see them, but...I don’t see anything special about them,” she said, and then added, “maybe because we grew up here, and we aren’t in them.” Later that day Jeff and I drove back into the hills to attend the annual Loess Hills Prairie Seminar, held every year in May and “designed to acquaint people with Iowa’s unusual Loess Hills” according to its brochure. I skimmed the license plates in the parking area of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources¹ Wildlife Area in Monona County, where the seminar is held—Nebraska, South Dakota, and lots of Iowa ones—but not many from Monona County. We met some friends

from Turin, Onawa and Moorhead (all Monona County towns) that night to have a beer. One had never heard of the seminar (which celebrated its 20th year in 1995), and none had attended it.

It was these observations and conversations with residents of Monona County, and the increased attention placed on the landform by those living a distance away from it, that drew me to the Loess Hill region for my dissertation research. I began to see how the residents were contending with boundaries of the landform and scientific facts that had been given to the hills.

I was also intrigued by all the attention given to the area from outside of it, and the (near) absence of attention to the area coming from within it. It seemed odd. And the blatant omission of voices from those living and working in the hills bothered me.

Thus I (self-righteously perhaps?) saw a need for a more balanced representation of voices on the hills. Knowledge of how some individuals, primarily those external to the hills, perceived this place was evident, or becoming so. But what the hills meant to those who lived here was lacking. While a great deal has been written on the area in terms of the biophysical aspects it holds, it was time for the social aspects to also be brought forth.

Lacking in the sociological literature is examination of the influence insiders and outsiders play in the formation, and changing of meaning(s) given to a specific landform. The influence in the Loess Hills region by scientists, tourists, journalists, and others makes this area a particularly appropriate place to study the meaning given to place, a concept "devalued" too often in social science.²⁵ I conclude my dissertation with a conversation on what my findings imply for the area, and then broaden my discussion to the larger dialogue occurring on power and democracy, a dialogue in which we all need to be involved. Thus, what is happening in the Loess Hills has implications not only for the landform and the region surrounding it, nor for just the State of Iowa. For issues of power and democracy exist everywhere, within communities of all sizes, and landforms of all shapes.

But for now, let's grab the maps (Figures 4 and 5) and head to the hills!

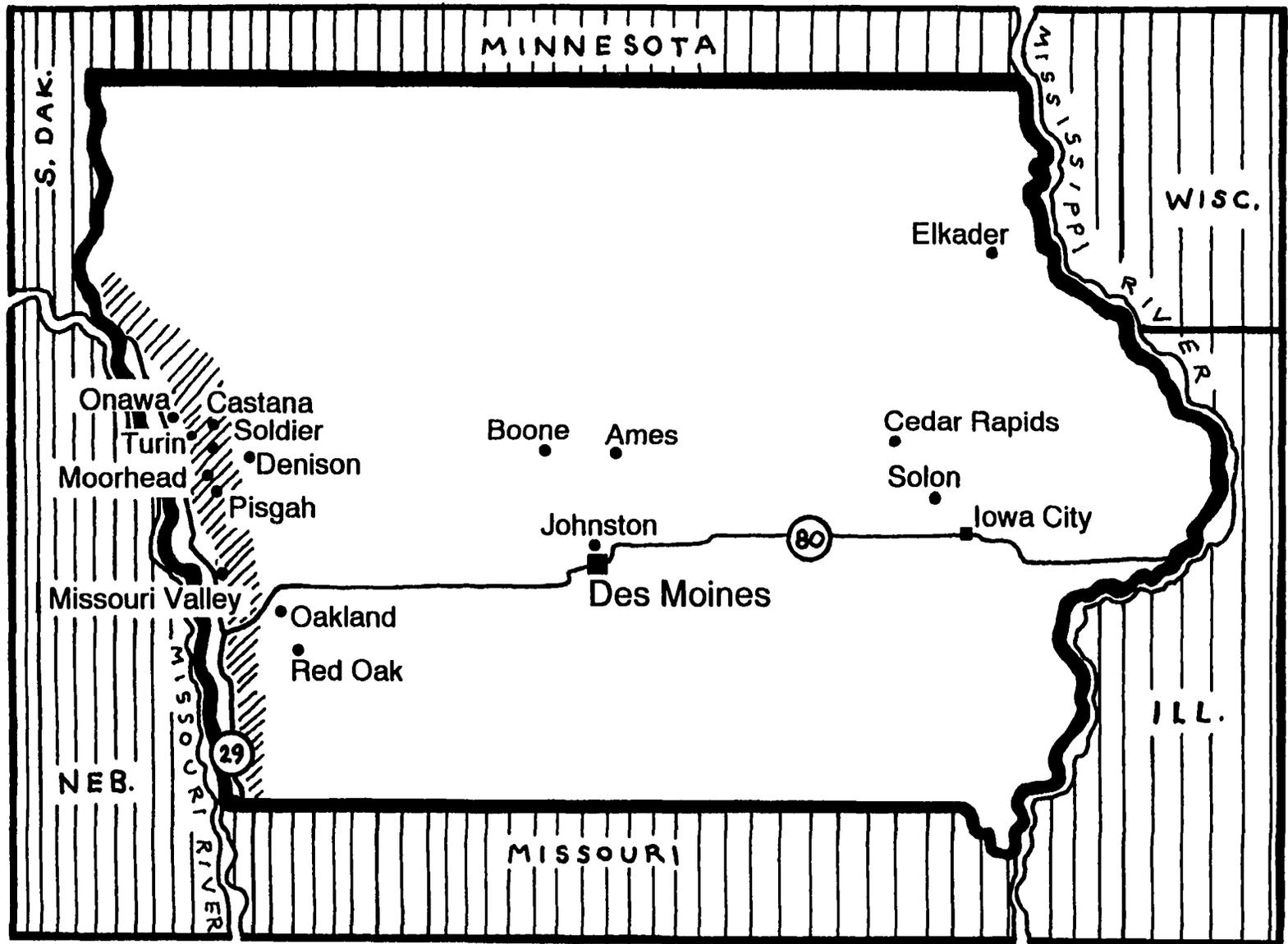


Figure 4. Map of Iowa

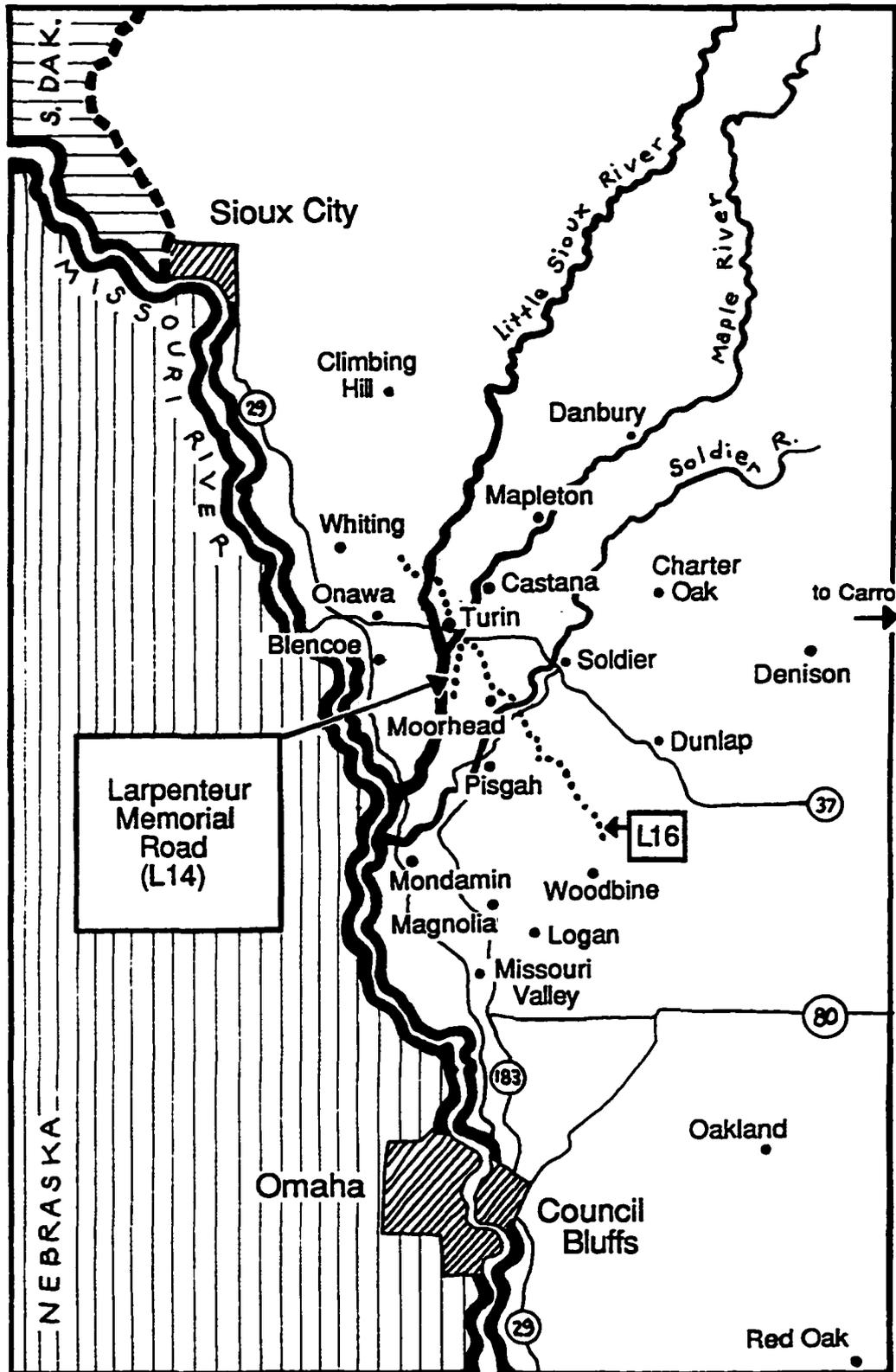
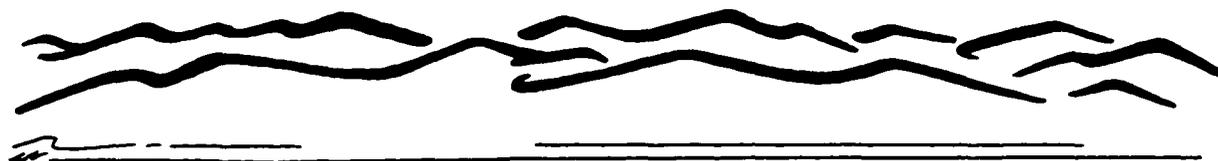


Figure 5. Map of research area

CONSTITUTING THE DISCOURSE



TWO**TOURISTS AND SCIENTISTS AND JOURNALISTS.....OH MY!!!**

Inside "ExecuCoach"

Heading north out of Missouri Valley on Highway 183

Harrison County

Dick, according to his card, was the operator of the "luxury motorcoach" he drove along a section of Highway 183, a section also designated as part of the Loess Hills Scenic Byway. We, a lively group of tourists from the Methodist Church in Omaha and myself, were on a Fall Leaf Tour sponsored by the Loess Hills Hospitality Association. The 1997 fall colors were dull this October, as they were all over Iowa, but lack of colors didn't seem to phase the 60 and 70-year-old tourists. For many this was their second or third trip to the hills together. They were a "wild bunch" Lolita told me while I sat with her on the motorcoach, and they "have fun wherever we go...Branson...Mall of America...wherever we go," she repeated.

Tory was the tour guide that day. After introducing himself to the group and letting them know I was a "fine Czech gal" who wanted to "come along for the ride," he told the story which is told on every Hospitality Association tour. "When the Loess Hills thing first started," Tory began, "we knew we had foothills over there but nobody ever thought anything about it. But in 1988, Soldier, Iowa, a town just six miles up from Moorhead celebrated their centennial. And two men from England came over and they were friends of Trace who lives just out West of Soldier. They said to him, 'You know, these hills are unique. You've got something that people would pay to come in with buses and see.' So we started on a very small scale and I think we've had in the neighborhood of 200 buses now."

Tory continued on, talking about his ancestors settling in the area, giving information on the term "loess," and broadening the discussion to the problem of drugs in rural America, even pointing out several (suspected) drug dealers homes as Dick drove us past them. We all peered out the motorcoach windows.

*Trace's Home**Just west of Soldier, Iowa**Monona County*

But I wasn't along "just" for the ride. I was interested in those people and events initially involved in the constitution of the Loess Hills, those who had a major role in the initial discourse. There are many discourses on the hills occurring, but the one in this chapter I call the dominant discourse. Power is produced through discourse by a structure of actions, and the initial actions in the dominant discourse were attributed to tourism promoters, scientists, and journalists. In this chapter those individuals whose voices initially constituted the Loess Hills tell their stories,¹ important to the overall story of the Loess Hills, as well as providing the base for analyses to come in the following chapters.

In his book, *place and placelessness*, geographer Edward Relph writes, "We live, act and orient ourselves in a world that is richly and profoundly differentiated into places, yet at the same time we seem to have a meagre understanding of the constitution of places and the ways in which we experience them."² The following stories contribute to a more ample understanding of the constitution of the particular place the Loess Hills.

And so, not long after the motorcoach tour, I found myself in Trace's kitchen. Trace stood near the stove, cutting onions for lunch while I sat on a step in the kitchen. He and his mom, Pearl live in their yellow home, located "just west of Soldier" as Tory indicated, and nestled in a small valley. They have several outbuildings—Pearl's art studio where she has a matting and framing business and two unique looking sheds that Trace hopes to fix up and rent out to individuals who "need to get away from the city stress" as he put it. Due to the placement of the home in the valley, you can easily drive or bike right past it if you're not looking specifically for the house. There is a sense of isolation in the little valley where the home is perched, and contributes to one of the reasons Trace often states he "grew up on an island."

Before I met Trace, I heard many stories about him from people in the area. Some of these (it turns out) are true, and some (Trace tells me) are not true. In the 60's, he'd been in

Ecuador in the Peace Corps (he was), and “walked home” (he didn’t). In the 70’s, he had walked across Africa several times (turns out he biked). And in between these adventures, while home in Soldier, he would find “amazing spots” on the hills to take friends to drink wine, beer and look at the view (he still does). After living in the hills for a couple of weeks, I knew I needed to talk with him, for it was his name more than any others (in the area) that, as Tory indicates, is associated with “the Loess Hills thing.”

I wanted Trace to tell me his story of how the Hospitality Association came to be, for I was interested in gaining an idea of when tourism began in the area. After cutting the onions, Trace and I moved into the living room and he sat and began his story. “For 17 years, I had spent my life somewhere else. But I found myself back here. My father was dying and my mother needed help, and I had crushed my foot. So I was kind of stuck, you know...” adding a second later, “physically.” He continued on. “At the time we were having our centennial in our little town of Soldier. So I was involved in this centennial and as a result of that, I noticed that everybody’s family was gonna come back from wherever they went to.” He elaborated his last point by adding, “I would say 90% of the people who grew up here, live away from here.”

“And so I got to thinkin,,” he pressed on, “well, where’s my family? I didn’t have any roots. My great-grandfather had come here in 1855, my grandfather had left here in 1907 and went to California. I was born in Los Angeles and moved here. So I had old roots but all these other people had come along in the meantime and I was detached from the area. And so as an outsider, I had to rely on my friends to come visit me.”

And Trace’s friends did come to visit him. And among these were two friends from California that, “thought it was a lark to come out here. We’d drive around these hills and dales and they remarked on what a unique, beautiful area this was with all these friendly people.” Trace then felt it necessary to add, “Of course that’s when they went to town and everybody was drunk. As I’ve told many people, the way we are in small towns is we’re very friendly until you get to know us.”

Trace expanded upon this latter comment and continued on with his analysis of rural life for quite some time (and which I elaborate on in Chapters 3 and 5). But then he realized

his diversion, and returned to his story, noting his friends felt “this would be a great place for tourism.” “Welllllll” Trace said to me, in a long drawn out way, “that’s a joke, you know, because all my life and everybody else’s here, we’ve seen people move away, not come. The only reason they would come back here is to marry or bury.”

But Trace decided “to humor them,” and began searching for land on which to build bungalows and bring in tourists. He found an acreage near Castana, but after meeting with the buyer several times Trace realized that “he wasn’t really gonna sell this place. His wife had died that spring and he really put up a ‘For Sale’ sign to get people to stop and talk.”

Trace found himself in a quandary as his friends were about to visit, thinking he had found them a “quaint little setting” they could bring European tourists. Trace had no place to put them. So before his friends returned to Soldier to seal the deal, he tried a different tactic. “What I did was each night for 5 nights, I called to different towns and talked with families (10 calls a night for 5 nights–50 different phone calls) about this situation. It would take me ½ hour each time to explain exactly what was goin’ on and say, ‘Is there any chance you could help out this summer and have this person stay with you for a weekend and you would get paid.’ To my surprise, of the 50 phone calls, I had 49 positive phone calls.”

In November of 1998 Trace offered his friends his alternative plan when they realized there was no land to build bungalows on. They thought it sounded wonderful and went off to Europe to get the tourists. However, they were a bit tardy in making the travel plans and there were no sales.

Trace then told me of the repercussions he perceived in the community. “Whenever I would go to the cafe or the bar or the coop, there’d be some little old lady come and go, ‘Well, are the tourists coming?’ And I would just get inundated with these questions about these tourists that weren’t showing up and I would say it was rather embarrassing.” Trace felt he could either leave or give tourism in the hills a try on his own. He opted for tourism, but, as he told me, he had no idea how to begin going about it.

He looked for assistance first at the state level. “If you watch the TV or look at the newspaper it says, ‘Well, if you have any problems with tourism, just call the state department. We’re rarin’ to help you out.’” So Trace called the Department of Tourism and

“they put me on the line with some expert they got there. And I get to talkin’ to this lady [about bringing in tourists to the Loess Hills] and she says, ‘That’s not where the state of Iowa’s going. That’s not in our 5-year program. That’s not a good idea. People would never want to do that anyway.’” She then directed him to the rural tourism representative for the area who also “thought it wasn’t worth a damn and wouldn’t be any good,” a comment Trace attributes to competitiveness among towns in the region.

Finally, Trace attempted to discuss the issue at the local level with the county supervisors. “When I mentioned it to them one of the supervisors said, ‘If a bus ever came into this area, I’d stand on my head bare-assed naked in the middle of Main Street.’ Of course,” Trace notes as he gives his explanation of the supervisor’s retort, “he was from Onawa out on the flats next to the Missouri channel.” (This last comment of Trace’s regarding the topography as an explanation for the supervisor’s reaction is one that I discuss in-depth in Chapter 4.)

Trace’s story highlights several themes I elaborate upon shortly. It was individuals coming in from the outside and remarking, as Tory and Trace both said, on the beauty and uniqueness of the hills that began drawing residents’ eyes to it more, or to it in a different light. These “outsiders” role in the discourse resulted in some residents viewing the hills as something that “was just there,” Bertha from Moorhead told me, to “they’re something else.”

But while someone from the outside felt the area would be a good spot for tourism, Trace didn’t receive the same reaction from the State Department of Tourism, the region or the county supervisor. At the State level in Des Moines, the capital of Iowa, tourism in the hills was not seen as an attraction, and so the Department of Tourism chose to stay out of the initial discourse.

Promotion of the hills at the regional level, according to Trace, was also not a popular notion, in part because of competitiveness for tourism attention and dollars it would cause among communities. And at the local level, Trace hints at the perception of the landform by someone not from the hills, someone from “out on the flats”—indicating the geographical boundaries between those in the hills, like Trace, and those not.

Being turned down at the state, regional and county level didn’t deter Trace. In fact,

he says he felt encouraged when the “bureaucrats” turned him down. But he still needed help developing local tourism. So Trace’s next step was to “find someone else who cared. And I had heard about a lady who had started the Bed and Breakfast Association of Iowa who lived in Missouri Valley in the next county, Harrison County. Her name is Dr. Desiree and I went to visit with her...”

Apple Orchard Inn

Missouri Valley

Harrison County

Desiree and I sat in the living room of her Bed and Breakfast, “located in the rich loess hills and apple land of Iowa” according to her inn’s brochure. Desiree grew up on a farm just outside of town, lived in San Diego for a number of years, and returned to Missouri Valley in the 1980’s. Desiree is the tourism representative for Harrison County. I asked her how she came to be involved in the local tourism efforts regarding the Loess Hills. She explained when she came back to start her business, she’d get county maps “and I’d draw the roads in that were the scenic roads and when guests would come I’d hand them that map. And I’d say. ‘Well, get lost in the Loess Hills.’”

Desiree was thinking of her next step in facilitating this touring of the hills, which was “to make little signs for the farmers to put out on the corners to tell the guests which way to turn.” During this time, someone told Desiree “There’s a fellow up in Monona County that sounds like he’s trying to do the same thing you’re doing.”

“So somebody told you you should talk to Trace?” I asked.

“And somebody told Trace that he should talk to me.” So Trace and Desiree got together in her living room, with Forest, the coordinator of the Golden Hills RC&D. There was some funding available through the RC&D for printing of tourism brochures on the hills, and so “Forest and Trace and I sat right here in this living room and wrote the grant, telling people about the hills. It was 5:00 p.m. and we had it all done.”

“And then I said,” Desiree continued, “‘Now let’s write a grant for the scenic drives through the hills.’ Because,” she explained to me, “I was doin’ this on my own and each time

I went to the county office I had to pay for those maps, and I was getting tired of drawing on them! And they said, 'We don't have time to do that. We got the brochure that's good enough.' Well, after they left I wrote it up and it went through! So we got both the grant to do the map of the scenic drive and the brochure."

Forest is now the Project Planning Leader for the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Des Moines. We spoke on the phone, and I asked him to recall those initial days in 1988. He told me his memory may be a bit sketchy, but as he remembered, "I had been contacted by both Trace and Desiree separately. Trace was interested in doing agro-ecotourism and was trying to pull together money. In the meantime I'd also come to know Desiree, who was interested in getting a Scenic Byway established in Harrison County. It seemed these two ideas were comparable and I suggested we meet at Desiree's. So we had a joint meeting and decided to work on a two-county Scenic Byway."

"I had access to grant money through forestry [for the Scenic Byway]. In the meantime," he continued, "we got a second grant to get going on the rural tourism. So we formed a core group of County Engineers, County Conservation Board Directors, Harrison County Economic Development group, and Penny from Western Iowa Tourism."

With the grants, work began on creating the Loess Hills Scenic Byway with signs being painted and installed by the Monona County Conservation Board. Brochures promoting the area for tourism were also being printed. The problem was, Trace says, he wasn't sure what to do next, or how to go about promotion of tourism. So he thought about what his friends were initially proposing, bringing tourists from Europe, and decided that was a stretch. Working closer to home, Trace went to "Omaha, Sioux City, Kansas City, Des Moines, and Minneapolis." After interviewing 40 tour companies, nine showed an interest. So Trace drew some brochures together, planning a day trip with a noon meal provided by a local church.

Trace sent ten tours to Allied Tour and Travel and of these, they chose to promote the "Apple Blossom Special," their first tour, on May 1, 1991. The plan for the tour, as Trace explained, was to "start down at the (Harrison County) Welcome Center, go to Desiree's bed and breakfast for hot apple pie and coffee, drive 'em up through the apple orchards. And

what I had originally thought to do was once they get done with the bus tour in the morning, have the locals drive them around for the afternoon, telling them about growing up in the hills and showing them their favorite spots.”

So the tour was all set to go. But a few marketing problems arose. They couldn't get enough tourists to sign up and the tour was in jeopardy. Trace went to Sioux City and “I started beatin' the bushes. Lo and behold, we're pushin' and shovin' and gettin' people to sign up. The next week they ran the tour. It was such a hit that the very next week they ran 42 people. Then 45 people. And it just took off like a rocket.”

And thus began the motorcoach tours to the landform. An office from which to run the tourism activities was established in Moorhead. “I chose the town of Moorhead” Trace explained, “because I live in Soldier. If I would have established it in my own hometown, everybody would've said, 'You're fraternizing your own town and we're not going to help you.' So I had to go to a different town to start with *plus*,” Trace emphasized “Moorhead was on the border of Harrison and Monona County and almost right in the hills so it was a perfect location in between the two counties *plus*.” he emphasized again “the postmistress owned the building across the street which was abandoned and she was literally going to give it to me to start the project in lieu of getting some rent eventually.”

Trace equipped the building with furnishings from families and local cafes. The name, Loess Hills Hospitality Association was given to the building, an organization and a board were formed, with the members being the families Trace initially contacted to help. And a mission statement of the Hospitality Association was written which read, “To promote and provide economic development in Harrison and Monona Counties through the development of tourism in the Loess Hills region, keeping social and ecological aspects in mind.”

“So that's how it started” concludes Trace. Thus far, Trace, Desiree, and Golden Hills RC&D are the main actors in the discourse. More individuals were brought in quickly. Penny, Executive Director of Western Iowa Tourism³ and mentioned by Forest, is one of the individuals in the core group that helped with the Scenic Byway and development of rural tourism. Penny has continued to be an active participant in the discourse constituting the

Loess Hills.

Western Iowa Tourism Region Office

Red Oak, Iowa

Montgomery County

Passersby can peer in the window of the Western Iowa Tourism Office and see little stuffed brown steers and pink pigs wearing bandannas which sport the Iowa Tourism Theme, “Iowa, you make me smile.” The animals are placed among brochures on Western Iowa attractions, and a large metallic Loess Hills Scenic Byway sign. Western Iowa Tourism is a non-profit agency that receives the majority of their funding from the Iowa Department of Economic Development, Division of Tourism. The mission of the bureau is to “enhance the visitor industry in western Iowa,” according to Penny.

I was here to talk with Penny about how the regional office was involved with tourism efforts in the hills, and how long this had been going on. Penny heard of the term “‘Loess Hills’ when I first started here,” she told me, when she attended her first meeting “in 1989 with Trace and Desiree [who were] saying, ‘gee, these hills are really cool and people are coming here and we need to do something with it.’” Penny added, “I had not heard [Loess Hills] before. I always heard them referred to as bluffs and didn’t pay any attention to them to be real honest.”

Penny’s personal thoughts on how she viewed the hills paralleled her perceived thoughts of tourists they hoped to bring in on the motorcoach tours. “As far as tourists coming in, that was a tough sell. Many people have driven by and thought these were hills and didn’t understand the uniqueness. So they were sold primarily as mystery tours [where the destination is unknown to the tourist] for people to begin with. Because people won’t bite if you say, ‘Well, we’re going to Iowa’ or ‘We’re going to Western Iowa.’”

In other words, people need to be fooled somewhat when Iowa, and more specifically Western Iowa, is being promoted for tourism. These preconceived notions of tourists were really the initial perceptions of those promoting tourism, indicative of how those in the area viewed the hills. Penny “didn’t pay any attention to them.” Tory told us on the bus he and

other residents “never thought anything about it.” It was when tourism began, and motorcoaches started rolling through in 1991, that some of those in the landform began to view it differently. The power of this initial discourse and those involved began to change residents’ views of the hills.

Penny has been involved in several tourism efforts on the Loess Hills since that meeting with Trace and Desiree in 1989. Her efforts have included work on the Scenic Byway, assisting the Hospitality Association, and most recently working with the Golden Hills RC&D and the National Park Service in establishment of “Loess Hills Communities.”

Golden Hills RC&D Office

Oakland, Iowa

Pottawattamie County

Annie is the current coordinator for the Golden Hills RC&D, and also has been active with several Loess Hills projects. She inherited the job of completing a Corridor Management Plan for the Hills when she took her position as coordinator in 1997. She explained to me the management plan is designed to “manage, enhance, value and protect. It’s kind of hard to describe, but it gives you all the tools that you would need to prioritize possible protected areas.” I asked Annie about other recent projects the RC&D has been involved in. These include an updated and more elaborate Scenic Byway brochure (which received funding from the National Park Service and includes color photos from each county), and working on interpretative panels for each of the seven counties identified as being in the landform. The County Conservation Boards will put the panels on public lands deemed “notable” for historical, cultural or environmental reasons.

Annie also talked about the “Loess Hills Communities” mentioned by Penny. One of the purposes of establishing Loess Hills Communities is to provide education on the landform—to provide training on the Loess Hills. “So that when you go to the restaurant,” Annie explained, “and you ask the gal takin’ your money, ‘Do you know anything about these Loess Hills?’ that they don’t go, ‘Aw, nah, don’t know a thing about ‘em.’”

Annie explains without being asked why she felt this was needed. “Because I was in

a Conoco Station the other day, in one of the towns on the byway and somebody said, ‘Oh, those hills? I don’t know anything about them,’” echoing thoughts Tory, Penny and others had just a few years earlier. The dominant discourse has not changed everyone’s views of the hills.

Loess Hills Wildlife Area

North of Castana

Monona County

Willy is the director of the Monona County Conservation Board and was also one of the early actors involved in the constitution of the “Loess Hills.” As I noted earlier, it was the Monona County Conservation office that painted and installed the first set of Loess Hills Scenic Byway signs. Willy was one of two tour guides at the beginning of the motorcoach tours, and has recently been elected to the Loess Hills Hospitality Association Board.

I first met Willy at the Loess Hills Prairie Seminar in 1995. He leads the “leisurely walk through the hills” session every Sunday morning of the seminar. He assures those of us thinking of going on the hike that we have the best guide for it—a “short, fat, ugly bald guy who can’t walk fast.” (Willy is actually quite quick on his walk.) He and I rode over to the DNR Wildlife area just north of Castana. The area is made up of approximately 2500 acres. We hiked around in the snow and talked. Willy, who grew up in Eastern Iowa town of Burlington, has lived in the area 23 years and proudly states that he lives on “one of the highest spots of the hills,” just outside of Mapleton.

I asked Willy who really got attention on the hills going in the local area. “I would say Trace without a doubt,” he replied. “Trace and the Hospitality Association. I’ve been here 23 years, and I never would’ve thought about tourism. And when Trace came to my office and suggested that we do this I thought he was nuts. But I said ‘okay Trace’, and figured we’d give it a try.”

Willy’s comments echo those of Penny’s. Bringing tourists into the hills just wasn’t something those close to them thought of, and when some did think of tourism, the idea was perceived as a bit odd. Charles, a 60 year old from Soldier, lives in the area during the

summer months. Charles offered some of the local reaction he saw to the idea of tourism. “I remember people were skeptical. They wondered why they would have tourism in this area. They thought of it as a hair-brained idea of a group of people and they sort of laughed behind the scenes. I remember people in Soldier really thought it would develop into nothing. And they thought it was a scheme of Trace’s. He’s kind of far out,” Charles said, explaining the reasons for skepticism (which I get into down the road). So it wasn’t just the supervisor in the flats who laughed at the idea. Those who live in the hills were also skeptical of the discourse.

But the idea did receive some public support, shown in the willingness of residents when Trace called to see if they would host tourists in their homes. There was also a great response from those willing to be tour guides. The first year of the tours Willy and his counterpart in Harrison County, Norm, were the tour guides. “It got to the point where we couldn’t afford to do that anymore because of the immense amount of time it was taking,” Willy said, explaining how and why training of local guides began. “Norm and I both agreed we had to have support, we had to have more people involved, and to train guides would be the method that we would use to get this personal involvement of the people. And that’s been very, very successful,” Willy noted.

The training of local guides is something that Tory had mentioned to those of us on the motorcoach that fall day. “In the early days [of the tourism] we decided we were gonna have to train somebody to be step-on guides. We have a large home in Moorhead so we opened it up and we had 40 people in. We expected maybe 20 but there were 40 people came. So we divided ‘em up and Norm took half of them in our dining room, and Willy took the other half. So that’s the way we got our first education about the Loess Hills,” Tory noted. Those 40 people then became the guides for the motorcoach tours, after receiving training on the ecological and historical aspects of the hills.

Norm and Willy were responsible for this initial training and providing the “first education about the hills” to longtime residents—information that was new to many of them. As conservation officials, and more broadly “scientists,” they furnished knowledge on the subject of the Loess Hills, knowledge they had gained from formal education. Their voices

were sanctioned, as they were the “experts,” and they were given power in the discourse, and at the local level.

Willy is not only involved with educational efforts at the adult and local level, but also educational efforts, which are being done with children and at the state level. They “try to take kids out for a hike and just make sure they have a day in the Loess Hills so they understand it. And the other project that we’ve done is worked through a Resource Enhancement and Protection (commonly referred to as REAP⁴) grant and we’ve created a video, working with Iowa Public Television. They are taking that and making it the first interactive video in the state of Iowa,” so any school using interactive video will be exposed to the Loess Hills.

Willow Lake Recreation Area

Conservation Board Office

Harrison County

Norm is director of Harrison County Conservation Board, and the other half of the “Norm and Willy” show that entertained motorcoach tourists. Norm has recently stepped down from the Loess Hills Hospitality Association Board of Directors, after serving for three years. We sat in his office, which has a nice big window overlooking Willow Lake, where the county conservation headquarters are located. Norm remarked upon the influence of various journalists’ efforts, as well as scientists’ efforts, when I asked about factors drawing attention to the hills.

Norm felt an Iowa Public Television documentary was the “awakening.” “Iowa Public TV kind of started the ball maybe 15 years ago or so when they did a series of documentary films called ‘The Land Between Two Rivers.’ The Loess Hills segment that they did was kind of a springboard. It was kind of like there hadn’t been anything done. I think Connie Mutel was maybe beginning to work on her book, *Fragile Giants*, but it had not come out yet.”

Norm thought about his response for a few minutes and then clarified himself. “And it wasn’t even right when they did the ‘Land Between Two Rivers.’ Then it was a couple of

years later before the people started to call. ‘Is there really virgin prairie out there?’ ‘Yes, there is,’” Norm says as he recants the conversation. “‘Can you show it to me? I’m a writer for so and so.’ *National Geographic* called and I’m assuming they had to have picked up these pieces from ‘The Land Between Two Rivers.’” Norm’s, and earlier Willy’s, comments introduce the role the media has played in bringing attention to the hills—another actor in the dominant discourse.

Iowa Public Television Studios

Johnston, Iowa

Polk County

While waiting for Tom Moore, Executive Producer of Iowa Affairs, I glanced at the many TV screens in the public waiting area. “Sesame Street” showed on one, “Nova” on another, “This Old House” on a third, and a “Living in Iowa” segment on a fourth. I began to check out the literature scattered around the tables. I picked up the August 1997 issue of *Connection*, an educational newsletter focusing on telecommunications. Inside was an article that discussed “Earth Trails: Loess” the interactive CD-ROM (mentioned earlier by Willy), which was distributed free to all Iowa school districts in 1997.

Tom appeared and we went into a comfortable room decorated in green to sit and talk. I asked him to reflect on how he became involved working in the Loess Hills. “I was putting together the proposal for ‘Land Between Two Rivers,’” he began. “I had just finished a series called ‘The Iowa Wildlife Series’ and had worked with Dean Roosa, [the former state ecologist] on that. And Dean said, ‘Well, you really need to focus one program on the Loess Hills.’ And...” Tom stops to emphasize his next point;

“I had no idea what he was talking about and I’ve lived in Iowa all my life. And I didn’t even know how to pronounce it and neither did anyone else. In fact, that was a controversy early on. How do we pronounce it? Because for some people it was ‘luss’ and ‘loose’ and ‘lo-ess’.⁵ And so to put it on the air we had to make a choice of how you even say it for people to accept it.”

Tom’s comments bring up the grappling with science that occurred for those involved

in producing the landform. To speak about it, promote and educate others on it, a “correct” pronunciation had to be determined. The correct pronunciation, Tom noted, came from Dean Roosa and Jean Prior, [research geologist for DNR] both of whom pronounced the term “luss.”

Tom continued talking about the documentary. “The first series of ‘Land Between Two Rivers’ were based on landform regions and that was inspired from Jean’s [Prior] book.”

“What type of public reaction did you receive?” I wondered. Tom laughed as he recalled, “As soon as we aired ‘Land Between Two Rivers’ I started getting calls from people saying, ‘Where is this Loess Hill? Where is this?’ And the perception even then from a lot of people is that it was either a hill or it was a state park or something like that. And I would tell them, you know where it is? It’s the entire western border of Iowa! It’s not just a small area. And people really couldn’t grasp it because I don’t think at that time people thought of Iowa as being...” Tom stopped mid-sentence and clarified, “actually before Jean Prior, I doubt that people thought of the state being different types of landforms and ages.”

In our conversation, Tom brought forth the role media has played in the discourse, bringing science out of the lab, and into the public’s view. When science was brought forth, it caught Iowans by surprise, revealing the lack of identity the landform (and by extension Western Iowa) had in the eyes of other Iowans in the late 1980’s.

Trowbridge Hall, University of Iowa Campus

Iowa City

Johnson County

I caught up with Jean Prior, a senior research geologist for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at the Geological Survey Bureau. Jean and I went into the conference room to talk about the hills, and her involvement with them. The first trip she made out to the Loess Hills, she told me, “as a geologist was in 1970. And I went out there just to look. I was trying to see different parts of the state as I could fit them into other things.” This “looking” resulted in the publication in 1976 of her book *A Regional Guide to Iowa*

Landforms and a follow-up 1991 *Landforms of Iowa* book.

Jean has been involved with the Loess Hills at various angles. Besides her two books on Iowa landforms, she had a continuous presence at the Loess Hills Prairie Seminar for approximately 20 years and a close relationship with the Prairie Seminar founder, Carolyn Benne. The Prairie Seminar is held annually as a memorial to Carolyn, who until her death in 1980 was the Western Hills Area Educational Agency⁶ environmental educator. Carolyn's husband Larry has continued her legacy and the Prairie Seminar. As Bruce Hopkins, Administrator for the Western Hills AEA told me, "Carolyn Benne started something, Larry Benne has *been* it."

Carolyn invited Jean out to western Iowa to give programs on landforms. "From that contact," Jean explained, "she asked me to come back for the Loess Hills seminar that was just getting started. And she had gotten this group of presenters together, people that knew something about geology and something about wildlife biology, prairies and woods and animals. She just wanted people to come and experience that. Learn more about the Loess Hills through specialists in the field that enjoyed talking to people and showing 'em things and leading 'em on field trips."

From the time of the seminar's inception, it has grown from a little over a dozen in attendance, to approximately 300 participants. "That was probably the biggest change," Jean noted. "One of the unique things about it," Jean continued, "is not only do you have this array of natural and cultural history types of activities, but it appealed to a wonderful spectrum of age ranges and backgrounds all there, outside, focused on the natural environment, learning more about it, sharing what you knew with other people.

"And that was great," Jean continued. "I think it was one of its," then she stopped and proclaimed, "*is* one of its best attributes. Young people can mix with older people and it's bound to have a beneficial effect."

Jean reflected upon all the activities she's seen regarding the hills, and how this activity has grown, introducing more actors in the discourse, primarily conservation and science types. She mentioned the increased attention in has received assistance from "the books that have been published in the last 20 years," noting, "The landforms book, Connie

Mutel's books...those have had an impact. And the *Iowa Conservationist* had a special issue on the Loess Hills. The "Iowa Academy of Science" has had a special symposium on the Loess Hills. Groups like the Nature Conservancy that have seasonal fieldtrips always include at least one Loess Hills, and sometimes two a year. I also think "The Land Between Two Rivers" did a lot to highlight that area."⁷

The first scientists to describe the hills in any written form were Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, as they passed through and stopped in the region during the summer of 1804 with the "Corps of Discovery." Lewis and Clark weren't using the term "Loess Hills" to explain the landform they saw. However, they did use a term that is still commonly used to depict the area—the bluffs. Stephen Ambrose notes in his book on the Lewis and Clark expedition, *Undaunted Courage*, that after burying Sergeant Floyd (a member of their expedition) just south of present day Sioux City, "The captains concluded the proceedings by naming the river Floyds River and the bluff Sergeant Floyds Bluff."⁸

No doubt the primary reason Lewis and Clark did not use the term "loess" to describe the bluffs was due to the fact that it wasn't until much later in the 19th century that this term was applied to the landform. As I noted in chapter 1, the research conducted by Jean and others credit Bohumil Shimek with placing the word "loess" upon the landform. How the hills were formed was in dispute within the scientific community for some time. "It wasn't until the interpretation by Shimek that this was recognized as wind deposited material," Jean explains. The term is of German origin, and "was already being used in Germany as the name for wind-blown silt in the Rhine Valley. And then Iowa's silt deposits became recognized as wind-blown," Jean clarified.⁹ At one point in the scientific discourse, the hills weren't "recognized" as "Loess Hills" until agreement upon a theory that attached "loess" to the landform. Power and knowledge were employed in the discourse from the very beginning. The scientist Bohumil Shimek, whose knowledge and therefore power attached "loess" to the hills, is the first individual to begin the discourse constituting the "Loess Hills."

It is Jean's map from her landform books which is often used when referring to the boundaries of the landform (and which I myself use when I need to give a general idea as to where they are). A later map, constructed by the Golden Hills RC&D in 1993, uses Jean's

map as a base, but becomes much more specific when placing boundaries upon the hills. using township lines to designate inclusion (or exclusion) in the landform.

So with the work, primarily based on and from geologists, boundaries of the landform are being drawn, and use of the term “Loess Hills” is taking hold. Another term, although much lesser known, is that of “Fragile Giants,” made somewhat visible with the publishing of Connie Mutel’s book of the same name.

Connie Mutel’s Home

Solon, Iowa

Johnson County

Again I found myself sitting in a kitchen, this time sipping tea with Connie Mutel. Her home is located in a woodland. To reach her front door, you walk down a woodchip sidewalk from the driveway, itself a small piece of concrete, which appears somewhat apologetic for existing, with its sign “do not drive beyond here.”

As with the others with whom I had talked, I was interested in finding out more of Connie’s motivations for researching and writing about the Loess Hills. This writing has culminated in several publications which include her 1989 book *Fragile Giants: A Natural History of the Loess Hills*, and co-editor of the 1994 book *Land of the Fragile Giants: Landscapes, Environments, and Peoples of the Loess Hills*. Connie told me that “serendipity played a role” in her involvement in the hills. On the day she finished a big project, “Dean Roosa called me and said, ‘There’s all this literature on the Loess Hills, scientific literature, and it’s in scientific publications, but most of the people don’t know, don’t have any access to it. Why don’t you write something on the Loess Hills and get that into the public?’”

And she did. *The Fragile Giants* gives a comprehensive natural history on the area, in which Connie discusses what was occurring in the hills before humans ever set foot in them, the cultures which did reside in them, the hills today, and hopes/ideas for the hills of the future. Connie concludes with suggestions for her own “Scenic Byway” tours.

“Fragile Giants” was taken from a description of the landform written by Dean Roosa, entitled “The Loess Hills of Iowa—Fragile Giants in Need of Friends” in the special 1984

Iowa Conservationist issue which Jean Prior referred to earlier. Dean Roosa is quite correct when he told Connie “there is all this scientific literature.” He, along with Darwin Koenig¹⁰ documented publications that have been written about the hills. In the 1990 article “Bibliography of the Natural and Cultural History of the Loess Hills of Iowa,” the authors include over 900 pieces of literature. This list (not exhaustive!) consists primarily of articles based on the biophysical sciences.

In my own search for social science articles on the phrase “Loess Hills” I turned up no book or serial titles at the Iowa State University Library.¹¹ Social scientists have had a very limited role in the discourse, and therefore in the constitution of the Loess Hills. Lack of literature indicates the social aspects of the landform do not have a large role in the discourse (something I hope to change).

Connie has also been involved with work on interpretative panels for the Loess Hills Pioneer State Forest Visitor’s Center, which opened in November 1998. This work was done in conjunction with Marilyn, Director of Iowa State University Museums, and Kirby, district forester for the Loess Hills Forest.

Loess Hills Pioneer State Forest Office

Pisgah

Harrison County

In 1986, the state of Iowa through the Department of Natural Resources began to buy land for the Loess Hills Pioneer State Forest, located in Monona and Harrison Counties. “The total of the project is 17,726 acres,” Kirby told me as we stood next to a large map on a wall in his office. He pointed out the mapped out section of what the forest would look like if they had all the parcels desired. “We’re probably close to 9,200 acres right now.”¹² Fifty-three percent of that land is forested, 47% is non-forested. Of the non-forested part, 45% is agriculture land, 36% is prairie and 19% is grass. The agriculture land is farmed with 12 farming cooperators in the area, with the State Forest cash renting to them. Kirby notes that “this helps us too. Those guys that thought they were losin’ farm ground, put bids out on the ground and they’re refarming it now,” indicating a reaction by farmers to the State’s

purchasing of land. The farmers in the area thought they were “losing farm ground,” Kirby notes, a major concern for most agricultural producers who feel they need to continue growing in acres to survive in farming. Farmers were beginning to react to the discourse in a concerned manner (a theme I expand upon in the following chapter).

Bill Ferris, currently a state forester in Des Moines, was the district forester in the area in the 1960’s. At the October 1987 dedication of the State Forest observation deck (which I discuss below) Bill Ferris and Larry Wilson (former Director of the DNR) commented about the need they saw for a state forest in western Iowa. Larry noted he “sat down with the commissioners and said that we need to take a real aggressive approach down in Western Iowa.” Historically, Western Iowa has not received a lot of focus and attention from Des Moines, where the DNR Administration is located. It was not only the Department of Tourism mentioned earlier that wasn’t interested in Western Iowa, it was other state agencies as well.

But this neglect of Western Iowa was noticed by the DNR, and the state began buying land for the forest with REAP funds. Kirby detailed the manner in which interested sellers were contacted. “When they first started this project, the DNR actually went door-to-door just lettin’ people know that we were interested. Usually most people will let us at least have the first offer. And it’s usually a fair market value for ‘em.”

One of the primary reasons for the DNR’s acquisition of public lands is to provide public hunting and accessibility, according to Kirby. As he told me, “Hunting was based off of people going up to farmhouses and knocking on doors for permission. Well, that’s getting less and less all the time.” As hunters are a major lobbying group within Iowa, the DNR sought out more land in the hills to provide hunters with a place for recreation, an additional form of tourism in the area.

Probably the most visible structure attributed to the State forest is the Loess Hills Scenic Overlook, located approximately three miles from Moorhead, and a mile from Preparation Canyon State Park. The observation deck is placed in an area locally known as “the spot,” where Trace and Willy took the owner of Allied Tour and Travel when wanting to impress him, where locals went years ago and go now for “lovers lane” activities, and where

many locals would, according to Pat Severson of Moorhead, “just crawl up on top of the hill and sit there.”¹³ Residents went to the spot long before a structure was placed there.

In a September 1997 article entitled “Loess Hills are all decked out,” *Register* writer Betsy Rubiner tell us, “The spot offers a glorious panoramic view of the short, soft hills that are considered a geological wonder,” and warns us to get there soon, for “To find another area like it, you’d have to make a much longer trek—to China’s Yellow River.”¹⁴ The “spot” has been popular for years to those who live in the area, and is receiving increased media attention, especially from the *Des Moines Register*.

In chapter 1, I mention my surprise at the lack of writing on the hills done by the Onawa newspapers, when in 1994 and 1995, the years I really began to pay attention, there appeared to be a large amount written in the *Des Moines Register*. Otto Knauth, the retired science editor for the paper wrote on the area in the 1960’s and into the 1970’s. We talked on the phone and Otto told me, “I don’t know if I did a story on the hills as such, it was mostly on places in the hills, the skeleton man in Turin and Sergeant Bluff monument in Sioux City.” It was Larry Stone, the former outdoor writer of the “In the Open” column, and principally his work in the 1970’s through the 1990’s which began to focus more on the hills themselves, bringing the *Des Moines Register* into the discourse.

Outside Elkader

Stone Residence

Clayton County

Larry had told me he was going to be in Monona County the week prior to my stopping by to talk. I pulled into a driveway tucked away in the hills of northeast Iowa, and saw REAP license plates were on a station wagon, as was a dusting of loess. After a few months of being in the hills, my car wore the same look. So I knew I was in the right spot.

Larry met me at the door. Margaret, his wife, sat on a kitchen stool. Files of newspaper clippings surrounded her and the kitchen counters. Larry and Margaret had searched their files to see when he began writing on the hills. We sat at the dining room table, near a window that looked out over the landscape, which into and out of flew various

birds.

Larry shared with me some of his earliest pieces on the hills, as I continued my search for the “starting point” of increased attention to the area. “I think ’74 looks like the first time when I did any kind of a major piece on the hills,” he told me. The 1974 piece Larry refers to is his column entitled, “Iowa dust drifts spectacular” with a second heading underneath “Loess hills largest in world.” In his article Larry talks about the formation of the hills, and the buying by the Iowa Conservation Commission¹⁵ land which is now the Loess Hills Wildlife area—where Willy and I hiked and where the Prairie Seminar is held.

“Were there periods where you were writing more about the hills?” I asked.

“Connie Mutel’s book, I think, was a good excuse to do more,” Larry reflected. “You know, there was kind of a flurry of interest then. And then of course, the Loess Hills seminars, which I did several pieces on over the years.” Larry did some more thinking and then added, “I recall the *Register* did a series before I started there and it was something like ‘Iowans on the Western Slope.’ This would’ve been in the 60s. And they were looking for stories about people in the western couple of counties of Iowa, and I think a lot of those involved the Loess Hills. One of the reasons that I went to western and northwest Iowa was because the *Register* editors at that time, in the early 70s, were saying ‘now we’re neglecting these people in western Iowa. We really need to do more out there.’”

Larry pondered a bit, and went on. “Just talking about these things, it’s kind of reminding me that indeed when I was working on the farm department when I first started with the *Register*, the emphasis was western Iowa. Not necessarily ‘Loess Hills’ but western Iowa because the feeling was that western Iowa had been neglected and they really wanted somebody to go out there. And it may have been because I had the least seniority of anybody and I was being sent to the boondocks and they said, ‘okay, here’s some sucker we can send out there to the hinterlands to write about western Iowa to fill our obligation to the people in the hills.’”

So a third state institution, “The Newspaper Iowa Depends On,” an identity it proudly proclaims on its cover, contributed to the neglect of Western Iowa as well, and to the “people in the hills.” Larry’s work did help to bridge this gap (in much the same manner as the other

medium, Iowa Public Television), bringing into the public's eye view Connie Mutel's work and the Loess Hill Prairie Seminar. Once again, media took a position between science and the public, and brought the two closer together.

Chuck Offenburger, who was also known as "The Iowa Boy" (he no longer works at the *Register*) wrote several columns which highlighted the Loess Hills Area. While Otto Knauth talked about scientific discoveries and places of scientific interest in the hills, and Larry talked about the landform and activities that focused on it, Chuck Offenburger often took a look at the communities in the hills.

One of his articles has been enlarged 50 fold and is taped up for public view on the inside doorframe of the Hospitality Association's Visitor's Center. In this September 1997 column, entitled, "The Loess Hills, a real treasure," the Iowa Boy discusses some of the very issues I examine, especially the name change and influences on this. In his words, "I don't think the bluffs ever really got much respect, except from the Native Americans who originally lived around them, until naturalists and environmentalists started serious studies of them in the 1970s and '80s. That's when the name change occurred," Offenburger concludes, adding, "as near as I can figure. They became the "Loess Hills," using the name of their loose, yellow soil,"¹⁶ echoing the role scientists have at the base of the discourse, and suggesting until scientists "started serious studies," the bluffs weren't respected (except by Native Americans). In other words, thanks to the scientists' role in the discourse, now the bluffs are respected.

At this point in the discourse, it's hard to know how residents (assuming Offenburger was referring to residents) view the landform. Save for the tourism activities Trace and a few others got going, and snippets here and there, the residents did not have a voice in the discourse. It has been, up to now, primarily educated, middle-class individuals whose voices are constituting the discourse, constituting the Loess Hills. These voices have spoken well (or so I feel) for the landform. Yet these voices are a select group—a group whose voices have been *allowed* to be in the discourse. I'll come back to this theme later, but there are more voices to hear in this chapter.

An earlier column by Offenburger, from October 1994 is titled, "Moorhead looks up."

In this article, the “Iowa Boy” remarks upon the “Land of the Fragile Giants” art exhibit, and the impacts that the exhibit has had on the town of Moorhead. “Mark my words,” he predicts, “this art show is going to lead a whole new wave of public sentiment about what a geological treasure the Loess Hills are.”¹⁷

Some of the column is devoted to Marilyn, who I mentioned earlier is the Director of ISU Museums and worked on the interpretive panels for the State Forest Visitor’s Center. I will come back to the discussion of the *Des Moines Register*, but I want to pause briefly while I sit with Marilyn in her office at the Iowa State Center, in Ames. Marilyn is from Moorhead, so we spend some time talking about how everyone is doing out in the hills. I fill her in on who I have seen recently on main street Moorhead. Then we begin to talk about the art exhibit.

“Land of the Fragile Giant’s” features work primarily from Iowa artists, with a few other artists from surrounding states. All artists went and stayed in the Loess Hills area for several weeks, to capture images they would then put on paper, prints, video, and to music. The exhibit premiered in Moorhead September 15th, 1994, the date sanctioned art voices entered the discourse. After its premiere, the exhibit then traveled to five other Iowa cities, concluding its show in February 1995.¹⁸ Portions of the exhibit are now overseas in Cambodia and Swaziland, as part of the U.S. State Department Art and Embassy Program. The Brunnier estimates approximately 25,000 individuals have seen the exhibit.¹⁹

I asked Marilyn what she thought the exhibit’s impact did for increased awareness upon the landform. She felt, “It was an awareness, an awakening. ‘Land of the Fragile Giants’ was only one thing. People were starting to discover the hills and so I think it was just helping build a crescendo. And I really think that a lot of Iowa, anything east of Boone,” she clarifies, “have never paid attention to western Iowa before,” giving a former residents’ view of the separation Western Iowa feels from the rest of the State.

Marilyn told me of residents’ reactions when she first introduced the art exhibit. “I do think that because I was linked to that place through history—they knew my family—they’d long forgotten about me—but because I was a part of the group, I can come back and say, ‘We’re gonna do this show.’ And I think they thought I was out to lunch.”

“Really?” I asked while laughing.

“Yeah” Marilyn insisted, then recalled some of the residents’ comments. ““Oh, they’re just those old dirty hills and there’s all that dust blowin’ around that makes my house dirty and makes road travel impossible. There’s no gravel on it.”” But, she added, the residents still supported her. “They were very nice and they were very supportive. So I think because I was from there, the community was willing to say, ‘Okay. We’re not sure where this is goin’ but we’ll do it.’”

So the art exhibit was one more way of raising consciousness about the landform. The idea was met with skepticism to begin with, just like Willy reacted when Trace suggested tourism. “I thought he was nuts.” But the community, while perhaps perplexed about presenting the hills to the outside, gave their support to Marilyn, just as they did with Trace. Ambivalence, but also an eager willingness on the part of the residents to present their home to others, surfaces in these conversations.

One November Sunday in 1997, I went to visit Nan and Grant, who live just outside of Turin, on Larpenteur Road. The road is thus named, the story goes, after a French fur trader, Larpenteur who settled in the area. This part of Larpenteur road is also part of the Loess Hills Scenic Byway. I sat in their living room, and Grant brought over to me the *Des Moines Sunday Register*, which I was unable to get (they don’t deliver in my area of Castana). Grant had the opinion section open for me to see the two page spread titled “*Iowa’s Loess Hills: Awakening to the possibilities.*” A smaller graphic of the hills with the caption “A Loess Hills national park” was at the top of each page (and has subsequently been used everytime an editorial or article on the hills is printed). After my initial thought of “hey, they’re on *my* turf,” I glanced over the articles written by Bill Leonard. I had been volunteering at the Hospitality Association’s Visitor Center when Bill stopped by a month or so earlier while gathering information. I knew he was interested in writing something, but didn’t realize it entailed *this*.

“They’re talking about a trail on the western edge of the hills. Ya know,” Grant smiled and said, “that’s getting kind of close.” I agreed with him. For them, that is close. Nan and Grant have a beautiful “hills pasture” which abuts the western edge of the hills.

Des Moines Register Newsroom

Des Moines

Polk County

I sat with Richard Doak, editor of the editorial pages, in his office, a Loess Hills calendar hanging behind his desk. I could see Bill Leonard, who I would talk with in the afternoon, working away in his cubicle. I was very curious why the *Register* had chosen to take on this particular crusade, and asked Richard about how it all started.

“It’s been sort of an evolution,” he told me. I don’t know if there was ever a moment when we decided, ‘okay, we’re gonna push for a national park in the Loess Hill.’ For a very long time we’ve been concerned with the out-migration of young people from Iowa, and we’ve been convinced that improving the quality of life in this state, especially the outdoor recreation opportunities, are really a key to getting this state to attract the kind of people we want, and to retain young people. And so starting to think about the national park idea was an outgrowth of that. It wasn’t just enough to have a few nice state parks. We needed something that really would say, ‘Hey, Iowa has really got this spectacular thing worthy of national recognition.’” Viewing the hills as recreation, and a way to keep Iowans in the state are features of the *Register’s* discourse.

Richard continued. “I think specifically on a campaign, Bill and I just sort of cooked it up by ourselves. There wasn’t any formal deliberative process or anything. It’s just something that’s been in the back of our minds for a long time and we decided last fall, ‘Hey, let’s really start this campaign.’ And so we did. Bill went out there for a few days and did the preliminary work and then kicked off the series.”

“What are your objectives with the articles on the Loess Hills?” I wondered. “Just to raise the public awareness of the hills and to try to build public support for the idea of some special designation for them. And we’re hoping public officials and local leaders in the hills area will get behind the idea of a national park,” Richard responded.

This more recent discourse on the part of the *Register* has impacted what is currently going on in the hills, some of which I mention in Chapter 1. Several public officials have

supported the idea of a national park. Individuals at a Loess Hills Public Forum presented by the Iowa Legislative Council spent a day in September of 1998 discussing land use issues of the hills. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and his aide Patty Beneke, originally from Iowa, came out for one of Willy's "leisurely strolls" through the hills in late September 1998. Governor Tom Vilsack has gone on record for being in favor of a national park, and a proposal has been made by leading Republican senators to allocate \$6 million from gambling profits to preservation efforts in the hills. A Loess Hills Alliance has been formed, a notion which grew out of the public forum. The Iowa Senate is currently debating the bill and funding possibilities for the Alliance. Elected public officials have now entered the discourse, and the discourse has become more political. The reaction in 1998 and 1999 for more attention to be given to the Loess Hills has been well received by some.

However, the reaction and enthusiasm from the local level has been less so. Bill Leonard asked me that afternoon in the *Register's* newsroom as he talked about the national park idea, "why isn't there any local leadership grabbing ahold of this?" The primary reason is there are few local voices in this initial discourse. Trace, Desiree, Norm and Willy were the four local voices in this initial discourse. Norm is the only one who is a lifelong resident of the area. For the most part, those voices that have constituted the Loess Hills in this chapter are educated voices—implying sanctioned, middle class voices—the majority of which are from outside of the landform. It is now time to listen to another group—the hill residents.

THREE**MAKING A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A (LOESS) HILL**

In early June of 1997, Hank, from nearby Turin was showing me around the Moorhead area. He took me to the new scenic overlook located in the Loess Hills State Forest. As we walked up the ramp to the overlook a lone man walked down, a crumpled up Bud(weiser) can in his hand. “Well hi Fred,” Hank said as he recognized the man. “Everyone tells me what a fucking great view this is—hell, I can see this from my house.” Fred greeted back, without smiling. We laughed, me somewhat nervously.

The next week, the first of my “officially” living in the area, I went to Moorhead to get myself acquainted. A town of 267 individuals, Moorhead sits in Soldier River Valley, surrounded by the hills. At both entrances to the town, many of the light poles are adorned with banners which read either “We Welcome You” or “Celebrate the Hills.” Postcards, calendars of the hills, and limited edition plates with paintings of the hills are just some of the items for sale at the Loess Hills Hospitality Association, located on main street.

I stopped in the Post Office and met Liz Valley, the postmaster with a location appropriate last name. I introduced myself and let her know I was going to be in the area for a few months, looking at what people think of the hills. “You know, we used to wonder what all the fuss was about.” Liz told me. “When they are in your backyard,” she continued, “you don’t pay attention to them. But they are beautiful.” Then she asked, “Have you been to the lookout?” Liz asked. “I was there last week,” I replied. “We’ve been there several times.” Liz told me, “and everytime we’re there, there’s people coming and going. It’s quite a view!”

Both Fred and Liz were looking at the same physical landscape when they commented on the view from the overlook, yet they have quite differing outlooks. Even though we look in the same direction,” geographer D.W. Meinig writes, “we will not—we cannot—see the same landscape.”¹ We don’t see the same landscape because our view is socially constructed—the physical world we see around us is actually our social world, something we created, if only in our minds.

In the following pages, I expand upon the views that Fred and Liz see, as I discuss the various socially constructed “human meanings”² residents give to the hills. The human meaning, the given identity to a place, occurs at both the individual and the collective level. These identities at times overlap. In this chapter, I focus on the individual identity given to the hills by those who call them home. The hills are viewed in a material fashion by many, primarily a source of agricultural production. The residents also see them as “unique,” a term Tory used to describe the landform to us on the bus. For some, the landform symbolizes a lost past, for others a fun present. For all residents I talked with, the hills are “rural America.” I conclude the chapter with residents’ voices and their views on making a mountain of meaning out of the Loess Hills.

In the previous chapter I indicate those whose voices initially constituted the dominant discourse. Their voices tend to be the voices of middle class individuals, many of whom have high cultural capital—the ability to speak well. This ability to speak well is due to their class situation. Cultural capital is one aspect of “habitus,” a term used by Pierre Bourdieu to indicate “internalized, ‘embodied’ social structures.”³ Habitus is acquired through one’s lifelong position within society. The voices in the dominant discourse speak well, because of their societal position.

Most residents’ voices have been left out of the dominant discourse. The hill residents’ have lower cultural capital, due to the position they are within society, a position based on class. Here I take a look at underlying discourses, those which incorporate residents’ voices.

“I’m a farmer...I wish they were flat”

While agricultural production in Monona County, like other agricultural regions, has declined⁴ most activity in the small towns of the county still revolves around the industry. This is seen clearly in the physical landscape—the farmsteads, the grain elevators, and the coops. The prominence of farming in hill residents’ lives is also seen clearly in the conversations of those who once farmed the hills, and those who still do.

Emma and her dad Jacob are both retired, and formerly from the Moorhead area. Emma now lives in Onawa, and Jacob in a care center in Whiting. They used to live along

what many call “the foothills,” located on the western edge of the landform, and described by Jacob as “the first tier of hills.” Sitting in her home in Onawa, I asked Emma when people started calling the area “the Loess Hills.” She pulled out the *Fragile Giants* book from a bag full of Loess Hills information she keeps on hand. “This had something to do with it, but Trace had more,” she felt and then made sure to add, “but not everyone thinks they’re special.”

She told me about the day she and her dad drove towards Moorhead, on part of the Scenic Byway. Turning onto County Road L-16 from Highway 37, one can see on the west side of the road, a hill slowly dissolving with the help of a bulldozer. As this was the path I would take on my weekly trips to Moorhead, I, too, was able to witness the slow removal. Emma told me as thoughts of “they’re desecrating the hill,” ran through her head, her father Jacob told her. “look’s like somebody’s making themselves a nice field.”

Emma took me to visit Jacob, who at 93 years recalls a lot about the area. Jacob’s father came from Denmark in 1890. “My father started a farm out on the Sioux bottom, as most of ‘em did, flooded out the first year and then he moved back to the hills!” he began. “Then I bought this” (he pointed to a photo of his farm that was hanging on the wall) “in ’43 and, of course, some was bottomland and then they had the hills for pasture—what they call the Loess Hills. We didn’t know that’s what they were at that time,” he reflected.

Emma and her dad, like Fred and Liz, were looking at the same landscape, but with two different views—two contrasting views because they identify with the hills differently. Emma has been active with the Hospitality Association for some time. She is a tour guide for the motorcoach tours and a recently resigned member of the Hospitality Association Board—all activities which have no doubt impacted her social construction of the hills as “special” and the carrying away of them as “desecrating.” I don’t necessarily agree with Emma’s inference that her dad didn’t see the hills as “special.” It’s more that he saw farming as “really special,” indicated by the photo of his farm that he was sure to point out to me, and to place in the one room he is given in the care center where he lives.

The prominence farming has in Jacob’s view of the hills also shows through when I first asked him, “What did you think of the hills when you were growin’ up?”

“Well, it’s patchy farmin’,” he said, immediately displaying his identity to the hills and the link to their instrumental use of the hills—an identity which gets lost in the discourse in Chapter 2. “We had 200 acres and I think there was about 20 fields! And it was pretty steep, you know.”

“Did you ever worry about tippin’ when you were drivin’ a tractor?” I wondered, having had recent experience doing fieldwork and being scared to go on the slightest incline.

“No, not really,” Jacob responded. “I did upset a tractor one time out there...” “I think more than once!” Emma interjected. “I was sprayin’ these thistles,” Jacob explained, “and I’d set the brake every time. I’d leave the tractor idle, walk around and spray some thistles. One time I forgot to set the brake and I heard kind of a noise and I looked around and it was heading downhill. There was a terrace and it disappeared over that and I heard a clank! Got down there and a tree had stopped it. It really wasn’t hurt much. But it sure made a clank when it hit that tree!”

Upsetting tractors and patchy farming are two of the special dilemmas farming in the hills presents as opposed to flatter ground. But there are other obstacles as well.

Ted and Berry live and farm in-between Moorhead and Soldier. Ted grew up in the area, but moved away for 30 years first to attend college and then to practice veterinary medicine. He and Berry (from northern Iowa, where, she says, “farming was so much more managed”) returned in 1989.

“My people had been in the hills for a lot of years,” Ted told me. “My father loved the outdoors. He loved the hills and he liked to hunt the hills and travel the hills. So this was just my life.” Ted had promised himself that “I wasn’t going to practice ‘til I died. My goal was to get back in the hills and on the land,” displaying his yearning for, and determination to return to, the landform. Ted and Berry have a farm of approximately 200 acres, nestled in a valley.

When I asked them what they think of the hills, they had differing answers.

Berry immediately said, “Home. It’s comforting to come back. I think everywhere we go the wind blows harder and it’s more moderate here,” commenting on the protection the hills offer when one is tucked away in the valley.

“Boy, they can be cruel though in a lot of ways,” Ted said as he listened to Berry. “It’s tough to farm in the hills cuz all your fields are patchy and your rows never come out to a square end so you’re wasting seed. It’s tough in a lot of ways.” Like Jacob, Ted immediately described the hills in terms of farming, and the obstacles the landform presented, indicating his identity with his life as a farmer.

“It’s challenging,” Berry agreed.

“And you have to figure out if you turn downhill and work uphill or work downhill and turn uphill,” Ted continued. “I can see how people who farm in that flat land would just hate this,” hinting at the view he perceives those living and farming the flatland have towards the hills.

Ted added more thoughts about the “patchy” farming as he and Jacob call it.

“We went to a neighbors, he had heart surgery and the neighbors were puttin’ in his crop. And we were laughin’ about 60 acres but there were 11 fields. And we were kind of chucklin’ about that and then on the way home, why my partner and I got to counting up fields and figuring out acres and that’s about average. You’ll have a field 30-40 acres but then you’ll have a bunch of two-acre patches you’re farming. And you wonder how we can survive?”

Ted’s question cuts right to the core of “what the hills are like” for those who farm them. They are difficult to work, with their physical characteristics, and they are difficult to make a living from. It is not the easiest of lives. As Ted says, the hills, and by extension a life farming them, can be “cruel,” an opinion which gets lost in the dominant discourse.

Charles, from Soldier, considers himself “a native of the Loess Hills because I was born in the center of ‘em, and I’ve lived on farms that are in the Loess Hills.” During the summer, Charles is active as an educational tour guide for the Hospitality Association. Charles and his family lived and farmed in the hills. Those farming the river valley ground were seen as the “good farmers,” Charles told me. “We always thought of ourselves as kind of poor farmers who just made a living because we could never raise the same crops as in bottomland. If you had the money you tried to buy good bottomland.” The problem was, most of those in the hills did not have the money. Those who farm the hills were, and are,

primarily of the working class. The good farmers had the good land and straight rows. And the type of land a person had said much about the type of person they were. Those in the hills were perceived as poor farmers—both literally and figuratively.

Bull is an 88 year old retired farmer, who lives in Castana with his sister Sparkle. He always wears overalls, unless he's dressed up, and then he dons suspenders and one of several caps, two that read "Retired and loving it" or "I ♥ Castana."

Castana is a town of 159 residents and known locally as the town without any paved streets. In order to get into town, you must drive up a hill. Castana still has three businesses operating—the Post Office (with George, the postmaster who came down from Sioux City to "get away from the stress") Burke's grocery store, and the Silver Dollar, more commonly called the "Castana Tap."

Bull "went into farming for myself in '44 or 5 and I quit in '78. That's the years that I farmed for myself. And I 'batched' all that time," he added with a smile. Bull farmed 123 acres. "That don't amount to nothing to what they farm nowadays," he said. "I had some alfalfa for the livestock and then the rest of it went to corn and beans—mostly corn but I always had some beans. I raised a few hogs and I had a little herd of cattle, I think the most was 24 head."

To have a little spending money when he was growing up, Bull told me, "why we'd trap gophers. .10 a pair! And in the wintertime we would catch a few fur bearing animals that we could get—cat skunks and weasels and minx." They would skin and sell the hides. Gophers "we'd just cut their front feet off and got .10 a pair for the feet. We took 'em into Onawa there and there was a bounty, we called it, on 'em." Gopher's, Bull explained, "were awful hard on people's alfalfa fields. They'd throwed up mounds. If you let the gophers run they pretty near ruin the hay crop."

I asked him to describe the area where he grew up. "Well, quite a few of us have land on the Maple Bottom and if you have land back away from the bottom, then you run into what we call benchland. And that's good land to farm but it may not produce quite as good as the bottom ground."

The bottom ground was, and still is, the desirable ground, because of all the reasons

given in these first few pages. A recent farm auction notice for a Soldier River Valley farm reads, in part, “This farm, containing 80 acres, more or less, is prime bottom land.” The tax base also shows how land is valued. On the hill ground, residents pay approximately \$2.00 per acre, (“and that’s too much” note some hill residents). Hill ground is essentially considered wasteland. Property taxes on the bottom ground are approximately \$23 per acre.

Hill farmers also differed from those in the flat land as almost all, at one time, raised cattle. To make use of the steep ground which could not be cultivated (although much was attempted early on, according to author Connie Mutel), cattle were raised, for they were able to graze the grass. “You’ve got to sell something off these hills,” Ted noted, again revealing the “eeking a living” theme those in the hills faced. Many hill farmers were and are diversified in their operation—raising both crops (usually “corn, beans and maybe a hay patch for your cows”) and livestock. The area is still known as “cattle country,” at least to the livestock judge who attends the Monona County Fair. While raising cattle has declined one still sees more alfalfa fields and hay bales while driving in this area of the Midwest compared to other, flatter parts. The physical landscape is different, indicating so too is the social landscape, with smaller farms and livestock.

Cows also have problems in the steep hills. Harry and Louise live on Larpenteur Memorial Road, part of the Scenic Byway, which is several miles north of Turin. Entering Turin (a town of 95) from the east, a sign welcomes you, proclaiming “Turin—Heart of the Loess Hills.” Turin is in the Missouri River floodplain and abuts a Loess Hill. There are no operating businesses left except for the Coop. The Post Office went a few years ago, it’s closing accelerated by the flood of ‘93.

Harry and Louise live on the western edge of the hills, where the abruptness of the Missouri River floodplain against the hills is quite visible. They are semi-retired farmers who pasture around 80 cattle. Harry is from the area, and Louise moved from Whiting when she was 14 years old because her family needed land to farm. I sat with them and their 40-something daughter Bea in their home, designated by its pig mailbox. Their living room window faces west and looks out over the floodplain, as most homes on Larpenteur Memorial Road do. In the back of the house, the view looks east, into a steep hill.

One indicator of identity attached to and by those in the hills is symbolized in a local joke, which says you can tell who is from the hills by the way they walk, for they have one leg shorter than the other due to tromping up the hills. But Harry told me in a serious manner (as have others), “when I walk the hills, I don’t walk straight up ‘em, I go this way and this way and this way to keep on the level,” waving his hands back and forth and describing a switchback. “It’s so much easier. You walk a little farther but it’s a lot better,” he assured me.

Their cows can’t walk so easily. “All the time I was growin’ up, til after the time I retired, the cows had these hills here,” and he motions to the back of the house, where the hills and pasture are. “We never had a cow fall off of ‘em. I never did. Well then, the last 10 years, we had three fall off and kill ‘em.”

“Really?” I asked, startled as I had not yet heard of this.

“Oh, yes,” Harry answered, then elaborated, “Come down the hill just rrrr rrrrr rrrr. She heard one of ‘em,” he said as he motioned to Louise, who added, “I heard one of ‘em come down the hill. It sounded just like a big tractor tire. Clup /// Clup.”

“Does it lose its footing and then it falls?” I wondered, trying to understand why this happened.

“Yeah,” Louise noted, and Harry added, “It’s pretty steep up there.” And then Harry explained his reasoning for why this occurs. “I’m sure it’s because when we were farmin’ we had Angus and Hereford cattle, and they were more sure-footed. Now that we got these exotic crosses, they got big feet and they’re clumsy. They’re dumber too!” Crosses of cattle were made in an attempt to improve farming in the hills, to help the farmers survive. “They crossed ‘em with our cattle to make our cattle bigger,” Harry noted, a change in agricultural technology which was not always so appropriate for the topography the farmers and cows were in.

Geographer Edward Relph has written, “Places manifest themselves in our experiences or consciousness of the lived-world.”⁵ That is, the world of everyday life contributes in part to our social constructions.⁶ Everyday life for hill farmers was difficult, thus the hill landform is viewed as difficult, “cruel,” as Ted put it.

Sociologists Thomas Greider and Lorraine Garkovich define landscape as the “symbolic environment created by human acts of conferring meaning to the environment.”⁷ The meaning we give to the environment is emblematic of ourselves in it—it is a definition of ourselves. When I asked residents who have used the hills for instrumental purposes about living in the hills and what they think of them, their descriptions are couched in agricultural language. I was told where their land was located, what type of land it was, and obstacles to farming. I was told how they situated themselves in the landform.

The world of everyday life for hill residents who farm is one closely linked with agriculture—evident in their conversations and evident in the vernacular used by the farmers. “Foothills.” “Benchland.” “Bottomground.” “Bottomland.” All terms are used in everyday conversations by those who live in the area to help explain their experience of life. And when asked to describe the landform they live in, the language of those who farm(ed), is laden with agricultural terms and concern, as they work in an increasingly competitive agricultural world. Ted says it clearly when, after describing the farming conditions, he asks, “and you wonder how we can survive?”

There are no farmers’ voices in the initial discourse on the Loess Hills in Chapter 2. The Loess Hills Prairie Seminar is held every year in May, when farmers are in the field. The Public Forum on the Loess Hills, which discussed land use issues, was held in September. Farmers were too busy working the land to attend—they were harvesting. I attended the Public Forum, and there were few farmers in the crowd. Many faces were attached to the voices represented in Chapter 2, those of middle class voices, with high cultural capital.

This neglect in the dominant discourse is being met with different attitudes by farmer. For some, this is an attitude of resentment. One April evening, I sat in the Waterin’ Hole with Kent and Billy. The Waterin’ Hole is the little bar and restaurant located in the Moorhead Sale Barn, and adjacent to the Feedbunk Cafe. The sign on the side of the Sale Barn guarantees “Cold Beer Good Times” in the Waterin’ Hole. During the week the Waterin’ Hole clientele is mainly farmers (all men) who come to relax and have a few drinks. On the weekends, couples will come in for a good steak dinner and Texas Toast.

The agricultural motif is obvious through the smells, sounds, and signs in and around

the building. During the day, you can smell livestock close by, coming from the auction area or from the farmer's boots. Sounds of the livestock and conversations about the weather, crop prices, livestock prices, and the percentage of one's acres which are planted (or harvested) are also heard. Above the women's restroom is a wooden sign, with "Heifers" burnt into it. Above the men's—"Steers."

Bud is a "Photographer—Writer—Outfitter" according to his card. He is from Colorado. He leases hill land from local residents, and then escorts out-of-town hunters looking for trophy deer through the hill area. Bud was in the Waterin' Hole that April evening, and approached me, wanting me to explain catsteps—the formation in the hills that appear to be steps, but with grass on them. "You're better off asking one of these guys," I stated while motioning to Kent and Billy (realizing once again that I had come to be seen as an authority on the hills, when I knew the least about them).

Kent talked about the formation of the hills, and how the soil was highly erosive and shifts easily, shifting which contributes to the stair-step like shapes. Billy talked about the impact of the cattle pasturing on the hills, and how this gives the hills their funky form. There is not an agreed upon version for why catsteps are the way they are. In either case, it's a sign of the erosive quality of the windblown silt. At the base of all explanations, Connie Mutel notes, catsteps "are created by the repeated slipping and downslope movement of loess."⁸ Perhaps the best explanation I have heard is from a 6th grade student in the area, who suggested catsteps were formed "When the soil gave out and it just plopped down."

The subject of "catsteps," yet another aspect of hill farming, could be heard frequently that night in the Waterin' Hole. It was early spring, and anhydrous ammonia was being applied to the land. Twan stood at the end of the bar.

"You got your corn in?" Twan asked Kent.

"Yep, all in." Kent replied.

"Got your corn in Twan?"

"Haven't even started. I'm waiting for the coop. They came and sprayed the other day. Boy, they did a good job. They got places I never could have with those goddam catsteps."

At this point I joined in. "Why couldn't you have gotten there?" I wondered.

"Don't have the machinery, and I don't want to try it."

Tractors do not glide over the catsteps easily and many farmers do not want to attempt it. The guys at the Moorhead Coop were quite busy, for they had the monster-tired machinery that was able to ride over the steps and apply the nitrogen without upsetting.

Before Bud left he told me he wanted to read my book when I was finished with it. "They're just a bunch of goddam hills," Billy said, sounding exasperated. I sensed the attention the hills were getting in the conversation was irritating him. But I have also been with Billy when he has noted (affectionately, I think) "they're quite the hills." And I know he enjoys riding his horse through them with his family and friends, as a member of the Loess Hills Saddle Club. However, the same landform, which is seen as a source of wonderment by those who don't use it for instrumental purposes, is the same landform which was a source of failure for Billy.

Billy feels and says he is responsible for losing the family farm in the 1980's, located in the hills, during the "farm crisis." Trying to survive with hills to farm was difficult enough without the downturn in agriculture that took place in the 1970's and '80s. So the ambivalence Billy shows towards the hills, believing "they're just a bunch of goddam hills" but also having pride, in his statement, "they're quite the hills," is similar to what many other farmers expressed.

Thomas, a middle-aged farmer from Turin asked me one day abruptly, "What are you doing here?" When I expressed my interest in seeing what people thought of the hills, Thomas, who feels he needs to get bigger to compete in agriculture, responded somewhat bitterly, "They're a tough place to make a living, that's what people think of them," said in the same tone of resentment Billy had. Yet Thomas has also described them to me as, "a very beautiful place. It's beautiful. Everytime I've traveled, I've looked around and said there's no place better than here." This ambivalence is causing tension. There is pride the landform is being noticed (and by extension, so are they), but some displeasure of this as well.

Thomas' bitter comment was also said, I believe, for me to "get the word out" to those in Chapter 2 what life in the hills is like. Thomas' comment was intended for me as

well, a middle class “outsider.” By my presence in the area I was a visible symbol of the increased attention by outsiders (a point I elaborate upon in the following chapters), and I represented those in Chapter 2. Farmers feel that those involved in the dominant discourse don’t understand their life in the hills, nor how the hills are instrumental in their lives and needed for their livelihood. And in the initial discourse, there is little discussion about those who work the landform, about the position of farmers within the landform, or an inclusion of their voices. Not a very democratic thing to do.

Libby and her husband Bob and their sons’ families farm west of Castana. They have lived on their farm since 1943 and have 200 acres and cattle. When I called Libby to see if I could come talk with her about the hills, she told me, “A lot of people get the idea it’s all recreation. We have 160 acres in the hills, we make our living in them. You don’t think necessarily about the pleasures when it’s for necessity. But you can draw your own conclusions,” she told me. A “lot of people” think it’s for recreation because that is one of the directions the dominant discourse has taken—disclosing the power of those involved (tourism promoters, hunters, the State) to steer the direction.

Just before I moved back to Ames, a 40-year old beginning farmer from Castana wondered what I was doing in the area. I explained I was interested in seeing what people think of the hills. “What do I think of the hills?” he asked me and himself. “I’m a farmer. I wish they were flat,” said in a way which implied, “how else would I think of them?”

“I wish they were flat.” “Patchy.” “Steep.” “Tough.” “Cruel.” The words differ, but the meaning is the same to these farmers—the hills are tough when that’s the primary land you have to make a living from. And in a time and an area where competition for farmland is strong, clearing away hills to be able to plant just a bit more, a bit easier, appears to be a logical movement. It doesn’t mean the hills aren’t special. It does mean struggling to maintain a farm and the farming lifestory, and lifestyle, is.⁹

“Unique”

Residents asked me many times where I was living. I learned several responses that would work. One such reply is, “where Bill Hall used to live.”¹⁰ One time, after giving that description, I was told, “You’re just north of my brother, Hickory.”

“That’s right,” I answered.

Then my new friend, Minnie, said, “your hills aren’t as unique as ours.”

I took some offense to this, but didn’t say so, and instead asked her what she meant. Where her home is located, there were higher and more “dramatic” peaks (she felt). Mine were “more rounded.” In terms of a physical description I must admit she had a point. But what is “unique” covers a lot more than what is physically seen by the eye. Once again, two of us were looking at the same landscape, with a different view. “Unique” to Minnie was due to where her home was located, obviously a source of pride and “the foundation of our identity as individuals and as members of a community.”¹¹

One of the most frequently used words by residents (although not by working class farmers) when describing the landform was “unique”—one word, with many different meanings, but clearly central to the residents’ social construction of beauty. “Home” was one meaning for “unique.” Visible contrasts and scientific facts are two additional meanings.

Ginger is the former postmaster of Moorhead (the one with the building where Trace set up shop) and has remained active in the Hospitality Association since it’s inception. She has lived near Moorhead her whole life. “I’m one of those that just kind of stayed around,” she offered. Like many others, Ginger had used the word “unique” when she was describing the hills to me. I asked her to explain.

“Well, the way they were formed, and when you drive and here is this flat, flat, flat ground and then these hills, you know. And that this was all wind blown in like big giant sand dunes. And that there’s only one other place in the world that they are found to that depth. And so that is a real unique thing,” Ginger felt. The hills gained rarity in Ginger’s eyes, when she heard the scientific fact “there’s only one other place in the world.” This fact contributed to the “uniqueness” of the hills for Ginger, indicating the influence and the power of the scientific discourse to change her perceptions of the landform.

Ellie’s home in Moorhead is perched on a hill with a deck, which gives you a good view of what’s going on on main street. Ellie is the town librarian and describes herself as “the town pest.” She is also in charge of opening up the Moorhead Community Center when a Hospitality Association bus pulls into town, to give tourists access to the restrooms. Ellie

likes activity, and always has a story to tell about her interaction with the tourists.

Ellie told me a bit about her life. "I've lived here all my life," she began, "all but one year when I was in Phoenix. And it is just home sweet home. And I was born here, in fact, right up on the top of the hill there," she motioned in the direction of her old home. "We didn't have a beauty shop here, and every Saturday morning I'd get up and I had eight ladies that I had to go wash hair, pincurl, and then go back after dinner. There was no beauty operator. So I done that all through high school." Then she began to talk about the motorcoach tours.

She, like Ginger, talked about the abruptness on the western edge of the hills. "I'm glad that they've expanded a lot of these tour buses up by Castana," Ellie said. "Why's that?" I wondered. "Well, maybe it's 'cuz I've seen so much of it here, but it's like a different world up there. Where in 'lo-ess' hill around here, you can go over one hill and there's another hill and another hill and you've got one on each side. Up there at Turin it is so different because here you're lookin' out this window and there's Onawa and it's just flat, flat, flat. You look out this window and it's steep, steep, steep. It's fantastic the flatness and then all of a sudden these hills are right here."

"So you think that's really striking?" I wondered.

"Yes. Yes. Yes," she replied.

The uniqueness, "like a different world," Ellie notes, is attributed to the contrast between the flatness of the Missouri River floodplain and the steepness of the hills. "Uniqueness" is not only described by residents in physical descriptions, but social terms as well.

One day my friend Hank and I sat on my porch and talked about the hills. "They're unique," Hank said when I asked what he thought about them. And again, I wondered how unique was being defined.

"Well, what is unique to me more than just being beautiful, your heritage is here for a lot of people. Like the Norwegian church, the Dane church. This reminds me of my grandparents. Or it reminds me of my parents."

"The hills do?" I asked.

“The hills I guess, and then maybe some of the features in the hills,” he replied, noting built features such as the churches he had just mentioned, which bring back pleasant memories of family for him.

When I asked Libby what she thought of the area while growing up, Libby told me, “Well, I knew nothing else, you know. This has always been home. We just climbed ‘em and picked Easter flowers and loved ‘em. They were just part of our heritage, you might say.”

When I would ask some residents what they thought about the hills, they would begin by telling me their family history. At first I was confused. Why, when I was asking, “what do you think of the hills,” was I given a family genealogy? Because the physical and the social are blended. The hills are heritage to residents in them.

An important part of landscape, the geographer David Lowenthal has noted, is heritage. We all feel landscape is something inherent, intensely intimate, and is connected with our selves and our everyday activities.¹² To treat a landform as unique is to treat it as an individual—to treat it as something intensely intimate and connected with us, a valued self.

One way to personalize the landform is to give features within it a local, familiar name. Giving place names personal names “humanizes” them and creates a person with standing.¹³ And the hills are full of personal place names. “Mann Hollow.” “Sophie’s Hollow.” “Johnson Road.” “Brown Grade.” “Sorenson Hill.” These are just a few of the terms which are part of the residents’ everyday intimate attachments to this place—language which navigates them around in their world, and contributes to their sense of place.

“Uniqueness” is also attributed to the isolation of the area, isolation that for some constitutes beauty. Nan and Grant, (who I introduced in Chapter 2) farm approximately 1600 acres in the Loess Hills and river valleys and are part of a family farm, which has been in the hills for 120 years. When Nan described the landform for me she noted, “Physically it’s a beautiful area. And because it’s a little bit isolated also adds to its beauty.”

When Ginger gave her description of unique and expanded upon the abruptness on the western ridge, she paused and added, “But that alone, I don’t think...it’s the people and the vegetation, the beauty, the open, the expanse. Living here in the hills, it seemed like you

were kind of far away from everybody and everything. So you were quite isolated.”

“Well, I think they’re beautiful and I enjoy them more than,” Ted stopped and explained that growing up, “I didn’t understand them that much. You lived in ‘em, you utilized ‘em, you played on ‘em. And we even made some little caves in the hills. But now you have a bigger picture. You recognize that this is a really unique landform and area. And society too. The people are closer-knit, I think. That’s becoming less and less but the communities are more isolated than some.”

If the landform was full of people, it would lose the uniqueness and beauty it has for some residents. That is, the landform is a positional good, a term used by economist Fred Hirsch. Positional goods are “goods where desirability is predicated at least in part on short supplies, limited access, higher prices, and consequent social honor.”¹⁴ Residents have access to the landform, which not many other individuals share with them. This isolation increases the status of the hills, and they become a positional good for hill residents.

“Unique” is a term used often by residents to describe the hills. It is a term which is central to residents’ identity of the landform— for the hills are “unique” as home, in the broadest sense of the term, where residents’ heritage is inherent, and where *fewer* people makes the place *more* beautiful.

A lost past

The hills are described in aesthetic terms by those who live there, but are also described by noting the specific changes that have occurred in them. And *the* specific change over the landform noted is the increase of cedar trees. This change has affected residents’ social construction of “beauty” and their memories of place, and is in part influenced by the dominant discourse.

Jacob’s land is now part of the State forest. I asked him if he ever thought it would be owned by the state. “No, I didn’t. We didn’t think they were anything particularly unique,” showing a more instrumental view of the hills. Jacob reflected a bit on his comment, then added, “Much more timber grows, you know, since my days. The bluff hills, when I was younger, had very little timber on ‘em. There weren’t any cedars. We’re partly guilty of that because there was an area over around Preparation,¹⁵ people would go there,” pausing and

then admitting, “even we went over and got some [cedars] and planted [them] around the yard.”

“For a windbreak?” I asked.

“Well, no. Just for ornamental purposes mostly. What a mistake that was,” Jacob added, shaking his head. “That was one of the bad mistakes people made around here cuz they’re worthless really and they’re just takin’ over.”

What was once pretty for Jacob has changed. At one time he saw the cedars as “ornamental.” Now, they are “worthless,” and on a rampage as “they’re taking over.” Like Jacob, Desiree also once saw the cedars as contributing to the beauty of the hills.

“I would take pictures of these hills,” Desiree shared with me as she gave her impression of the hills. “I’d take pictures and make a nice diorama of it because I just thought they were so beautiful, you know. And, of course, when I was a kid they weren’t pretty like this because there weren’t trees on these hills at all. They were just barren hills. And then I’d come back, and that was the start of the cedar trees,” she clarified, “thinking that these little evergreens were gonna make the hills more beautiful. And then I found out,” Desiree noted, with a tone of being somewhat deceived, “as the cedars grew more and more, that this was not for the hills.”

Even though Desiree states she found out “cedars were not for the hills,” a part of her still sees them “for the hills,” with her use of the present tense—“they weren’t pretty like this because there weren’t trees on these hills at all.” Desiree is caught, feeling she probably “shouldn’t” think the cedars are “pretty.”

When Nan was describing the area, she too, brought up the physical change in the hills. “We never used to have trees to speak of behind our house. You used to be able to see the tops of the hills. The trees have just come in and taken over. And I think it’s lost a lot of its beauty because of that. I’d like to see the trees gone.” Tory told us on the bus “they’re a weed, really. A bad weed.”

But not all view the cedars as “bad,” or at least at one time did not. The social construction of beauty has changed—in large part because of the recognition of what cedars do. The “beauty” of the cedars began to change to the cedars “taking over” when residents

began to realize how quickly the trees spread and loss of vegetation (and therefore pasture) which occurred with them. What Desiree and others “found out” was that when cedars get to a certain point, they can’t be removed just by burning. They need to be girdled or chopped down. For those who want to keep them off their land, their best bet is to cut them down while they are still small (and not so thorny!) With knowledge about the impact of the trees on the hills, came a change in the way they were viewed, a change in the social construction of beauty, due in part to two factors—identity and a lost past.

Just as the type of land a farmer has says something about the type of farmer he is, so too does the type of pasture and the amount of cedars that are in, or not in it. Absence of cedars indicates hard work, for it *is* hard work to remove them (or so I’m told, I’ve never tried it). Just like weeds in the bean field, cedars in the pasture is a very visible sign of a “bad” farmer. So who keeps their pastures “clean” is public information. My neighbor, Hickory Nutt, has few, if any cedars in his pastures, and everyone who knows him, knows this. “He does a good job of keeping the cedars out,” you hear when Hickory’s name is brought up—another way of saying “he’s a hard worker.”

Jacob asked me what I thought of the cedars. “Well, I like trees,” I said somewhat hesitantly. I expected trees to be there when I first went to the area, showing my own social construction of beauty and how my growing up in a more forested part of Iowa influenced it. I did find the cedars pretty. I found them pretty, that is, until I attended the Prairie Seminar and learned more about them, and what they do to the hills. For this was prairie country, and cedar trees are not a “good” thing for prairie. Clean and clear hills became “beautiful” in my mind. I too, took note of whose pastures were clean, and admired their perseverance in keeping the cedars out. So as residents’ views of the landscape changed in regards to cedars, so did mine. My social construction of beauty, and some residents, changed in large part because of knowledge gained from the dominant discourse, knowledge that primarily said “cedars are bad for the hills.”

“I like trees too,” Jacob agreed with me, “but these are kind of a useless tree.” They are considered a useless tree now, but that was not always the case. At one time cedars served several purposes. The early settlers brought trees with them as they departed from the

East, for they weren't sure what they would find in their new adventure, but knowing trees would eventually provide them with shelter and fuelwood. And at one time, they provided a pleasing view (and I suspect for some they still do although they may not want to admit it). "Cedars" have a stigma attached to them, especially for those whose land is full of them.

The lament of cedars taking over is, like "unique," also intimately connected to residents' lives, especially to a lost past. Harry from Turin had a lot to say about the cedars. In fact, the first thing he said as we sat down in the living room was "to me, with all these trees, the hills are gone, they are gone. And that is sad." I asked him to tell me more about what it used to be like.

"You could see all over," he said as he waved his right arm from one side of his body to the other. "Now when my dad was a boy, the only trees were just down in a fork where the creeks were and the fire could not get down in that little, narrow place. Just old gnarly oak tree. [Elsewhere there was] no brush, no nothing, just beautiful grass."

He had Louise go search for a box of memorabilia, and we talked as he went through the box, showing me love letters from his grandparents and old photos. He was looking for one photo in particular to show how bare the hills once were. He found it, and as he showed it to me said, "You can see in '72, look at the hills. This is below Turin a little bit. A neighbor down here, he had a picture taken out on his bottomground, and 20 years later he took another one. You couldn't believe the difference. Even when we moved here you could see the top of the hills here. Can't now. They're gone. Too bad. But maybe some day they'll get rid of this brush," Harry ended hopefully. Harry's lament is for a lost view, and also for a lost past, a lost past that is tucked away in a box which was somewhat difficult for Louise to find. This longing for the past came out in other's descriptions of changes in the landform as well.

In early December, I was volunteering at the Hospitality Association Visitor's Center. I got a call from Bull's sister Sparkle, who lives in Castana. She wanted to know if we still had some of "the throws." The throws she was referring to are the Loess Hills Afghans. Made by a company in South Carolina, these type of afghans are currently seen in tourist areas throughout the US.¹⁶ The term "Fragile Giants" is machine stitched across the bottom,

and in the middle the words "The Loess Hills Western Iowa," surrounded by eight drawings of buildings and objects chosen to symbolize the area.¹⁷

The Afghans were going quick as Christmas gifts. But I assured Sparkle we still had some, and she came in later that afternoon with her friend Rose. We began talking, and I told Sparkle where I was living. It turned out that she had lived in the same house, working for the family who once owned the farm. Sparkle often repeats statements she wants to emphasize, and as she left the Visitor's Center, she told me, "thank you, thank you."

One day, as we sat in "Sparkle's Kitchen," (so says the crocheted decoration on the wall says) and had coffee and sweets, she talked about living in the hills. "I was born here. I was born in these hills and I lived south of town here about 5 miles. And I was the 10th child of 11 kids. We went to country school. We all went to country school."

Sparkle told me of a woman who came to present a slideshow program on the hills. At the beginning of the Hospitality Association, those actively involved in promotion of tourism would present slide shows and tell stories about the area, as a way to educate the residents, but also as a way to gain support for the motorcoach idea. Sparkle talked affectionately about the slides. "I never tired of 'em. I could've watched 'em again and again. They were lovely. I loved 'em. I thought I'd seen all of that. But, I really thought we had beauty anyway. It wasn't that they surprised me with the beauty because I did enjoy the beauty of this country here, you know." I asked her which slides she liked the best.

"I was thrilled over the grass. Because when we were kids, my dad had a meadow of prairie grass, and the wildflowers. Oh!" she exclaimed, "they really grew in that. There was yellow and white buttercups, there was violets, and there was everything in that meadow. And so I was thrilled when I saw pictures of the meadow grass up in the hills."

"But none of the slides surprised you?" I asked, repeating what she had told me.

"No, they did not surprise me. It was just that somebody was seein' something that was already there. But the sad thing is, all these meadows and all that, they're plowed up and gone into corn and beans 50 years ago, see? I can't remember when my dad plowed up the meadow but we didn't get to play in it no more and get to go pick the flowers in it. And oh, to this day, I just yearn for those wildflowers."

Sparkle is mourning the past, as is Harry, a past which has been changed in large part due to what humans have done, or not done. The landscape change—the loss of prairie grass, of bare hills, and of wildflowers—are changes of some residents' identity.

Willy told me the day he and I hiked, “The largest stretches of natural prairies grasses left in Iowa is right here. I think our heritage has to lie in the vegetation that was here before we ever invaded this ground.” I had heard this claim regarding natural prairie grasses before, and heard it again that day, without thinking much of it. It wasn't until a few months later while I sat with my friend Addie in her living room in Charter Oak, and she commented on how some of this land a “plow has never struck.” For some reason, this time it struck me. I, too, began to see the heritage in the hills. Something still existed that was here long before we ever were. For those in the hills and elsewhere, virgin prairie grass is our history, our heritage, our past. Harry and Sparkle, and no doubt others, know that it is fading.

Tony Hiss, in his book, *The Experience of Place*, talks about the “fading” and adds, “discoloration,” which is occurring to places. “Until recently,” Hiss notes, “when people spoke about a vivid experience of a place, it would usually be a wonderful memory.” Now when individuals speak to Hiss of place, “some of their most unforgettable experiences of places are disturbingly painful and have to do with unanticipated loss....a curving road in front of an old suburban house, for instance, gets straightened and widened and suddenly a favorite grove of oaks or pines that the winds whistled through is chopped down and paved over.”¹⁸

Geographer Robert Sack writes that for all of us, “the landscape is replete with markers of the past...that help us remember and give meaning to our lives.”¹⁹ These memories are what sociologist Mike Bell calls “ghosts of place”—a sense “of a felt presence—an anima, geists, or genius—that possesses and gives a sense of social aliveness to a place.”²⁰ Some “markers” and “ghosts of place” have been removed from the hills, a removal which has resulted in a lost past and a lost identity.

A fun present

Laments of the past occur for some residents when they discuss the landform and its' changes. But there are also pleasant markers and “ghosts of place,” remembered in stories of

how residents once played. Ted told me, “we’d go over to my aunt’s. She had a series of cat steps behind the house that we’d go up, pick Easter flowers, and then roll down the hills and bounce over the cat steps.”

Clint, who grew up along the banks of the Sioux River and lived a mile west from Turin, recalled playing with his friend in the hills. “We used to go and swing on grapevines. We had a place called ‘The Canyon’ just north of Turin. And there was a big, big canyon back in there. And we’d cut a grapevine loose and then we’d swing across that and build forts and played war games.” This memory of Clint’s contributed to the feeling he had for the hills, seen as he continued recalling his days of playing, “So I always had a love for the hills in that regard. I didn’t know anything about the geological formations or the uniqueness or the plant life of anything else except that the yucca pods make great hand grenades when we were playing war games. And the little thorn that sticks out on ‘em can really smart if you hit somebody with that.” He warned me, “I mean, it’ll draw blood!” He loves the hills because of the wonderful memories more than the geological uniqueness placed upon it.

Yet others who currently play in the hills in much the same way these older kids did, are left out of the dominant discourse. The voices of children and young adults are also important, for issues of democracy, but also as they are in the process of creating “markers of the past” and “ghosts of place”—as they are attaching meaning to their home.

Some of the younger residents I talked with include a group of 6th graders. They told me what they liked about the hills, some likes which have been echoed by the “older kids” and which focus primarily around playing in them.²¹

“They almost look like mountains,” one 12-year old told me while we talked about the hills. A second joined in and corrected them. “Some places they *are* mountains.”

“One of the big hills,” one said excitedly, “we’ve got a pond right below it and it’ll freeze sometimes and we’ll slide down that and jump over a terrace.” Another terrace jumper added, “You can go out and have a snowball fight with your brother or sister or just go sleigh ridin’ and jump terraces.”

“You like to jump terraces, don’t you?” I asked them.

“It’s fun!” several said in unison.

“You go down and you go flying over a terrace.”

“And go flying?” I repeated.

“Yeah,” and if that wasn’t enough action for them, they added, “You go down the cat steps—boom, boom, boom, boom,” describing the same fun that Ted, Clint, and others had just a few years earlier.

One hadn’t spoken up and so I asked her, “What about you, Emily? What do you think?” “I like ‘em but I don’t really think much about them,” and Emily gave the answer I think most others felt. They are too busy playing in the landform to be thinking about such seemingly mundane issues as “what the hills mean.”

Markers of memories and ghosts of place are everywhere in the hills, seen in recollections of the wildflowers that were once there, the canyon that has been filled in, the family and friends who were played with, and the bare hills. These markers and ghosts of place receive little space in the dominant discourse. Yet they need to be there, to ensure that past memories don’t fade and new memories are still created.

just another name for rural America

After Trace told me the story I relayed in Chapter 2, I asked him what it was like living in the “Loess Hills.” “Well, it’s like living anyplace else in rural America,” he began. “You’re basically living in a small town, with its own rules, its own society. There’s the outsiders and the insiders, see? You have a problem,” he states, “you’ll find people at your doorstep before you’ve made a phone call cuz they’re watching. So there’s a sense of security in living in rural America from that standpoint.” Then, repeating my question, he continued, “So, when you say ‘what is it like to live in the Loess Hills,’ when you’re living here, it’s the last thing on your mind. Their minds are within their survival, within their community, within their business, within their family, within their friends. We’re really in rural America is where we’re at and we just put a name to it.”

In many of my conversations with residents about living in the hills, the feeling of being in rural America and the “good” things that entails pervades. For those who live in the hills, they are rural people. As both sociologists Marc Mormont and Mike Bell argue, “rural” is a frame of mind, and claimed as a way of life.²²

Rural is very different from urban in some of the resident's views, and rural is clearly better than urban. An anti-urban bias weaves through some residents' comments, with urban being anywhere outside of the hills. While talking with Harry and Louise, another daughter stopped by. She sat for a moment and added to the conversation. "You hear about all the things goin' on in the cities. It doesn't happen in the country, you know. Especially if you live sparsely like we do. Scattered out and kind of tucked back in the hills. We're gonna build a new home and we're gonna put the back of the house to the north to protect us from the snow and the wind." The things "going on" in the city (read: the "bad" things) don't happen in the country, where she is protected from the elements, both physical and social.

"He hated the flatlands," Ted told me as he talked about his dad. "He would go roaming through the bottoms and say it was always hotter over there in the summer and colder in the winter. And 'you need to get behind a hill.' He was really a product of the hills."

"What does that mean?" I wondered.

"Well," Ted explained. "you made what living you made off of the hills and survived in the hills. And when you weren't in the hills you were out of your element." The "bottom" is where Onawa, the county seat and largest town is located. The "bottom" is also anywhere out of the hills, someplace unfamiliar, and not as pleasant as the hills.

After visiting with Louise and Harry, I walked outside and stood with Bea, who was smoking a cigarette while looking out over the floodplain. It was a clear night, the stars were out and the coyotes were talking. Bea hadn't said a whole lot that evening, as she had told me earlier it was important I get her parents' thoughts.

"Listening to all this has me thinking," she said. "What do people do out there?" she questioned and pointed towards Onawa, where we could see a few lights. "The flatland is so boring. They can't hear the coyotes. They can't see these stars," looking upward. "It's just so peaceful here." Inferring it's not peaceful *there*.

"People who identify themselves as rural," the late Janet Fitchen found in her work in upstate rural New York, "are quite happy to engage in conversation about the landscape that surrounds them. Moving from describing specific landscapes to making general statements,

people invoke words such as ‘peaceful,’ ‘pristine,’ ‘natural,’ and ‘unspoiled,’ thus, descriptions of the physical landscape slide into a statement of social meaning attributes of the space in which they live.”²³

In their descriptions of the hills, residents do not distinguish the social from the physical. The hill residents see their rural landscape as “peaceful” and “protective.” Flatlands and urban landscapes are not. George, the postmaster came down from Sioux City to “get away from the stress.” Trace anticipates others will want to do the same, and plans on remodeling the outbuildings on his farm for those individuals who also “need to get away from the city stress.”

Some residents know they idealize “rural America.” They also note there’s a “dark side of the Loess Hills,” as residents have suggested to me. Changes are coming to their rural home. This is seen both explicitly and implicitly in some of the conversations already heard—concerns about drug dealers as Tory pointed out to us on the bus, loss of neighboring but still close-knit communities, as Ted and Ginger discussed, and evident in some of the conversations yet to come.

Shortly after I moved to the hills I was told about a team of Iowa State University researchers who had come out to look at Onawa’s community viability.²⁴ The results of the ISU report were shared with those who had been interviewed. The report also got passed on to those who hadn’t been interviewed, but had an interest. At the Castana Tap one evening, I talked with Robin, who had had an opportunity to read the findings, and told me he had gotten “a good chuckle out of it.”

“They aren’t asking the right questions,” he said and repeated, shaking his head, “they aren’t asking the right questions.”

“So what are the right questions?” I asked.

“How many meth labs do we have here, who’s sleeping with who, how many of us are alcoholics,” he told me succinctly. I went home and looked at the questions I was asking. They included questions about the Loess Hills, what residents think of the attention, pronunciation of the term. Important questions, I feel, but ones based from the discourse in Chapter 2, based on voices not from the area. And ones (I was becoming to realize) that the

thoughts to, did not consciously encompass a large realm in the resident's day to day thinking—did not encompass a large realm in *their* discourses. So when wrapping up interviews, I began to ask individuals, “what else do I need to know?” And what else I needed to know dealt with the main concerns people saw occurring in their communities.

When Nan talked about isolation, and noted one of the beautiful aspects of the area is the fact there aren't a lot of people, she didn't stop there. “In fact,” she noted, “there are fewer people here than when I moved into this area. Our population has dropped considerably. And particularly in the hills. Look at the empty farmsteads. And the amount of children in the schools. Look at the number of children in Moorhead and Soldier, Pisgah, Mondamin. Their schools are less than 50% what they were 25 years ago.”

When Ginger talked about living in the area, she noted the positives, but neither did she stop there. “It's changed just dramatically,” she added. “There's such a difference, you know. Today neighbors don't neighbor back and forth like they used to.” Ginger's comment echoes those of rural sociologist Paul Lasley whose Iowa Farm and Rural Life Poll measures the sense of “neighborliness” those in rural Iowa feel. Most rural Iowans responding to the annual survey “felt that neighbors visiting and helping each other has declined.”²⁵

Mike, the current mayor of Castana, was my rural mail carrier while I lived out in the area. I met Carol, his wife, at the Castana Ladies Thursday Lunch Club. Carol works in nearby Mapleton, at the Mapleton Press. Mike and Carol are in their 50's and have lived near or in Castana their entire lives.

Mike talked about the people who have moved to Castana in the past decade. “We've had a big change in this town, of the people that live here. A big percentage of 'em are on welfare because rent's cheap. To me,” he noted, “it's not cheap rent because they're awful poor houses.” He apologized somewhat for his attitude. “You shouldn't be critical but normally the people on that aren't people that take pride in what they have so they have a tendency to let things go. Garbage, old cars break down. They just set 'em up on blocks and take the tires off and get another car and drive it. So we got a little different type people than what we used to have.”

Issues of class, and how this impacts community pride is another central concern to

hill residents. Anthropologist Sonya Salamon and her colleagues, looking at “contested territories” within rural communities, discusses the impact of migration of the working poor to rural communities, and the struggles which ensue. These struggles are the same struggles Mike is describing. The “newcomers” and “old guard” have differing notions of respectability, and use of property.²⁶ The “different type people” coming into the hills and their behavior is of concern to hill residents’ notions of rural America.

Carol also related the decrease of pride to the fact that Castana was now a “bedroom community.” “Most of our people in this town are in the workforce. They have to drive someplace else to work. Bein’ as how they don’t have jobs in this town, they don’t have the community pride that people used to have.” Carol observed, “They just come home and sleep.”

Mike then added, “The wage standard in this county is not, I’m sure you’re aware, it’s not good. And so it’s gonna be hard to make changes which cost money. We’re short on industry. I don’t think we have over 3 or 4 industries in the county.”

Monona County is one of the poorer counties in Iowa, having the 8th lowest Census estimate for 1993 median household income.²⁷ I was aware of the low wage standard. A quick drive through Monona County and its towns Harry give one a good idea of the types of jobs available—in Onawa, service sector jobs—in Moorhead, Onawa, and Turin, not much.

When I was setting up interviews, Bea and I had to reschedule many times. I wanted to talk with her for several reasons, one of them being she is one of the few single women her age in the area.²⁸ But Bea works three part-time jobs. The last time she canceled she had just spent three 12-hour days loading 50-pound bags of seed corn. And she was tired.

Service sector jobs, impacts of the farm crisis and continuing economic difficulties, poverty and social disintegration are all aspects of “rural America” which writer Osha Gray Davidson details in his book, *Broken Heartland*, a case study of Mechanicsville, Iowa. The concerns Davidson found in this Iowa town, on the other side of the state, are the same concerns found in the hills. Many of these concerns regarding wages, community, pride, involvement, schools, came out before I ever even asked, “what else do I need to know?” These are the thoughts and concerns that are in the forefront of many rural Americans

minds—thoughts and concerns that require space in the dominant discourse.

Making a mountain out of a loess hill

An additional description some residents give to the hills is comparing the hills to “mountains.” Even everyday hill vernacular—foothills—defined in the dictionary as “a low base of a mountain or mountain range”²⁹ infers this comparison. Viewing the hills as mountains of meaning is taken both literally, and figuratively. How the residents describe this differs though, differs because of the class differences also seen in the hills.

While the majority of farmers I talked with mentioned very quickly the difficulty of farming the hills, there are other farmers who don’t. Their views of the hills tend to be similar to residents who don’t use the hills as a primary source of livelihood and describe it more in aesthetic than instrumental terms when I ask “what do you think of the hills.” These producers most often are those who are managing okay in today’s “agriculture climate” and have both hillground and bottomground. That is, these farmers are middle class. Nan and Grant are two such producers.

When I asked Nan and Grant what they thought of the hills Grant suggested that I, “drive down out here in the bottom four miles and turn around and look back when the sun’s going down. They’re beautiful.” Then, repeating a story he and Nan had told me about when he first brought Nan to the hills, he began, “It was a late December afternoon and we came across the bottom. It was just startin’ to get dark, and there these hills were raisin’ up, and she was impressed.”

Nan joined in. “I thought we were coming into a mountain range because it gives you that impression, 8-10 miles away when you look into the hills. It looks just like you’re coming into a mountain range because they come up so fast. They’re so straight up and down.” Nan elaborated on her description.

“It’s beautiful most of the year. It’s unique. It is unique. Particularly for us that live on the western edge of these hills, because of the steepness. I mean, you’ve got the Missouri River bottom that’s completely flat and all of a sudden you are going straight up in the air. So, that in itself, makes it very unique right here where we live. Now when you get back into the hills even 5 or 10 miles, you lose some of that because then you have the broad valleys.

You still have the stair stepping of the soil, which I've always felt was very interesting to see. I can't imagine a hill having stair steps up and down."

Nan finds beauty in the "goddam catsteps" Twan and the others couldn't take the tractor over, in part because they have enough acres that they don't have to farm them (something she and Grant readily recognize). She is also able to see beauty in the steepness, steepness that those farming don't find so beautiful as it causes tractors to roll, cattle to die, and overall farming difficult.

Nan and Grant are what I consider local leaders, even though they keep a low profile. Nan has a speaking part in the video "A Place Apart," part of the "Land of the Fragile Giants" art exhibit.³⁰ Nan was selected to speak because of her leadership and because of her cultural capital, the ability to speak well. Due to possessing these qualities, Nan is one of the few residents who has been given a small bit in the dominant discourse.

Malinda farms with her husband Curt just outside of Moorhead. Originally from Oklahoma, Malinda moved to the area in 1966. She has been very active in the Loess Hills Cultural Center, as programming chair for the "Land of the Fragile Giants" art exhibit, and in charge of seeking out monthly exhibits for the Cultural Center. When Malinda and I talked she was busy helping out with the Moorhead History Book and getting ready for Moorhead's Centennial in the year 2000. We sat in the Cultural Center where activity was buzzing all around us as volunteers worked on getting the history book ready for the printers. Malinda is therefore, a second local leader. She, too, speaks eloquently about the hills.

Like Nan, Malinda described for me the first time she came and saw the area, right after she was married. "It was at Mondamin, over by the apple orchards, and we came in through that way. It was like," she paused and asked me, "you know, you see these movies where they're bringing you into this rich estate, when they open up a movie and they show you this grand estate that all of the grounds are manicured and the music brings emotion to you, this rush?" Without waiting for a response she said, "well, that's kind of what I thought because it was in June and everything had just turned green and it looked like everything had just been trimmed with manicure scissors. And I just thought it was magnificent. I loved it then."

Grant, Nan and Malinda speak descriptively about the hills, giving a cinematic presentation to their descriptions. All three have middle class standing, status in the community, are local leaders, and well respected. Their class position, status and prestige affords them the right—the power to speak in the dominant discourse.

The language Malinda, Nan and Grant use is very powerful, moving, and lovely. Their voices are sought out and accepted because of their ability to speak well, to make a mountain of meaning out of the Loess Hills. Other residents, primarily those of the working class don't speak so eloquently, and are not given a sanctioned voice in the dominant discourse. While it appears on first glance these residents believe a mountain is being made out of a l(o)ess hill, on closer examination, they *also* make a mountain of meaning out of the hills, but use different words.

“Do you think differently about ‘em now?” I asked Harry, Louise and Bea.

“I suppose we do,” said Harry. To which Louise added, “They’re still just the ‘lo-ess’ hills.” “Yeah,” agreed Harry, “but I suppose now we seem to realize that they’re more than what we used to think. I mean we just lived here. We thought they were nice.”

“But now we’re important!” Bea exclaimed jokingly.

“Yeah, now we’re important.” Harry also said mockingly. He repeated, “We’re important now. We live in the ‘lo-ess’ hills.”

Libby recalled her reaction when she first heard about the “uniqueness” of the hills. “It didn’t really shake us too much, because we knew kind of what it was. We didn’t know all the history behind it, and that it was sort of a rarity, and we didn’t know they’d go crazy for tourism and all that. But that didn’t change our ideas. I said, ‘Gosh, we made a living off of it and it meant more to us than all the...’ not finishing but rather saying, “We just always lived in ‘em, you know.”

Harry, Louise and Libby’s answers to my query on the hills are brief, in comparison to the language used by Nan, Grant and Malinda. They think the hills “are nice” and they “meant more to us than all...” This use of short descriptions by the working class was also found by Mike Bell, in his work in the English village of “Childerley.” “Ordinary villagers typically characterized a view as pleasing because it was so “peaceful” “so natural,” or

because it “has such a history about it,” Bell writes, “and left it at that. Short responses were most common.”³¹ landform as something special—there is clearly an emotional attachment to them.

Other residents use an external construction of beauty when suggesting that perhaps a mountain of meaning is being made out of a *Loess Hill*.

“So what did you think of this place when you were growin’ up?” I asked Carol and Mike.

“We didn’t realize it was famous. It was just the hills you grew up in!” Carol said.

“Well what did you think when you realized that they were famous?” I persisted.

“It just seemed kind of weird to me. Here we’d lived there all of our lives and all of a sudden they’re famous now. It just seems strange to me. A group of us, we were in Ladies Aid, kind of laughing, not even sure how to pronounce it. After a while it gets to be old hat,” Carol noted.

“What did you think when you first saw motorcoaches come through Castana?”

“W O W !” Mike exclaimed. “Somebody’s crazy. Look at this. Who wants to see our rock and gravel streets? It just didn’t hit me our place was such a thrill, the goings on we have here. It’s just home.” “Rock and gravel streets” are not the things of beauty, Mike feels. And those coming to view it are a bit “off” in their judgement if they are to think so. The hills are home, “we lived here all our lives” and someone is coming in to see this, yet Mike and Carol aren’t sure why. Like some individuals initially did in the dominant discourse. Mike and Carol also use perceived external constructions of beauty.

Green, who I met on my first day out to the area in 1995, had similar reactions. He and I sat in the B&B Roundup in Onawa and chatted. He is from Moorhead but now lives in Omaha, and is one of the two I mention in Chapter 1 who had heard of the Prairie Seminar, but not attended it. Over a beer, we began talking about the area. “This is God’s country,” he told me. Then he asked me what my impression of the potential for tourism in the area was. I told him I’d only been there a day, and so wouldn’t know yet—but I did think it was beautiful. He said when I’m finished studying the area he’d like to know my opinion. I asked him what his impression of the potential for tourism in the area was. He replied,

“There isn’t any...they’re just hills.” He added, “there’s nothing majestic about them. They’re not the mountains or the ocean. He paused and reflected, “maybe its ‘cuz I grew up here.”

A comparison to mountains or oceans, which are “majestic” to Green, is placed upon the landform. I asked him why he called it “God’s country” if they were “just hills.” He admitted there were “majestic places” in the hills, but people (implying tourists) using the main roads would never see them, as they were off of the paved roads.

Later in our conversation, Green corrected me on my pronunciation of loess. “It sounds like lust,” he said, and then added, “without the ‘t.’” Now, while I can’t say Green was lusting over the landscape, his comments make it obvious he cares for the area—and is protective of it—although he may be embarrassed to say so.

Everytime I saw Fred, from that first time at the overlook, or subsequent times at the Waterin’ Hole, he was alone. Fred is a hired hand, and an individual with working class standing. His remark at the beginning of the chapter would imply he also feels a mountain of meaning is being made out of a l(o)ess hill. Yet Fred’s trailer is perched high on a hilltop, with a long driveway leading up to it. There could have been other places to put the trailer, certainly someplace where a well wouldn’t have to be dug so deep. But I believe Fred placed his home strategically, so he *can* get one of the best “fucking great views” possible. Looking out over and into, and being part of the landform is as important to Fred as it is those who speak a bit differently about the view.

Residents’ descriptions of the landform differ, in large part due to various levels of cultural capital residents hold. But mountains of meaning are being made out of (loess) hills by all the residents whose voices speak here—it’s just sometimes a closer look is needed.

like “being on top of the world”

Finally, some of those who live in the hills see them as “sacred,” at times explicitly using this term, other times saying so in a slightly different ways.

“The Loess Hills are sacred to the Indian people,” Marie Pearson, a member of the Omaha tribe stated in the “Land Between Two Rivers” documentary. “It’s life giving, it’s death supporting, and it takes us into the eternal realm with the great spirit. When we seek

wisdom, we go off by ourselves and the place that we go to, we go to the hills and stand in solitude. I go to the hills many times,” she said. “I go there because it gives me good mental health, I can get myself back together. I learn to be close to the great spirit there. And so I look to the hills for my serenity.”

Native Americans never lived for long periods in the area now called Monona County. They would, however, hunt and hold council in the region with other tribes (thus the name “Council Bluffs”). The hills are full of spiritual aura and sacred experiences for those who once lived there, and for those who still do.

When Ginger discussed isolation, she also talked about the sense of relief she got from the hills. “Being able to be up on these hills and just...I don’t know, it’s just this feeling of maybe being on top of the world. It’s peaceful, like you’re above all the goings on of the world—good, bad, indifferent, anything. It’s just like you can clear your mind and just breathe.”

Mircea Eliade, in his book *The Sacred and the Profane*, writes that the experience we gain from sacred places is the “manifestation of something of a wholly different order, something that does not belong to our world.” The Native Americans experience this. The residents of the hills today do so as well. When Ginger is on top of the hills she’s “above all the goings on of the world.”

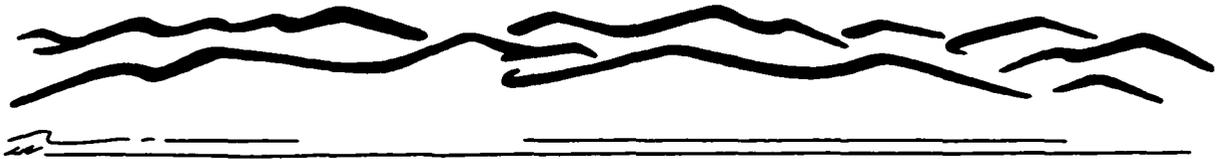
Sunbridges, “the last place that the setting sun would strike on the land,”³² are additional sacred places. The sunbridge for Native Americans was a bridge that the spirit could travel on—a spirit bridge between the land and the afterworld—between high ground and the west with a sunset. Thus, in Iowa the loess ridges are the last place the sun sets, and where several sunbridges are located.³³

Emile Durkheim argues “The idea of society is the soul of religion.”³⁴ That is, the experience of the sacred is the experience of society. The “sacredness” of the hills is very important to residents’ sense of identity, for it connects them to something “bigger” and something reassuring. When Grant discussed the “hills pasture,” (where the *Register’s* trail idea was “getting close” to in Chapter 2) he told me, “Things get really hectic and you can go over there and calm down.”

The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, in his book *Topophilia* uses the word to describe the profound and intense emotions we feel with places that are important to us. “Sacredness” and the other meanings residents give to the hills, such as heritage, uniqueness, home, are not (yet) quantifiable assets (nor do I want them to be). But these terms describe well residents’ voices on the hills, and the primary message is the hills evoke strong emotions from those who live there. Yet these emotions are not included in the dominant discourse. They need to be—for purposes of democracy, but also so “markers” and “ghosts of place” which are linked to the strong emotions remain as wonderful memories, and are allowed to be created.

III

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF THE DISCOURSE



FOUR

**PRIDE AND PROPRIETORSHIP
OR; NEW NAME, NEW QUESTIONS**

The Scene

Various individuals are being interviewed as they come out of local businesses located in small towns in Monona and surrounding counties in the hills. A microphone is placed near them, and a man's voice asks:

"I'd like to know if you know the meaning of a word, and that word is loess." The voice then spells "l-o-e-s-s." "No, I sure don't," a man notes, and runs off camera quickly.

"L-o what?" a perplexed woman asks. "L-o-e-s-s. Loess," is the reply. "Lost?" she asks, still perplexed (perhaps at such a seemingly simple question). "'luss' it's pronounced," the voice pauses, and then adds, "l-o-e-s-s." A verbal answer is never received, but the woman head shakes her head "no" vehemently.

"Loess is just a word that means.....oh.....it means the desire, to desire something, to desire life, to love," adds a pensive young man.

An elderly woman states with confidence, "It has something to do with soils, its good soil." "How do you know that?" the voice asks. "I don't know," she says as she laughs, but then adds, "well I read about it!"

"Well, we call it 'lōse' hills, it's the sand that's made the hills around here along the Missouri that were brought in by the wind," responds one of the last individuals.

The above scene, taken from the 1987 "Land Between Two Rivers" documentary, shows the various levels of knowledge residents of the hills had with the word "loess" in the late 1980's. The scene also is an early indicator of how residents grapple with the term, its pronunciation and its meaning. This grappling has arisen from the scientists' proclamation upon the landform, and the subsequent discourse that has constituted "the Loess Hills."

In the following pages, I look at the social consequences that have resulted from the creation of the new landform. Increased social interaction in public places and the impacts

this has had on community is one outcome. These impacts are seen in clear physical changes—physical changes which have brought about social changes within the region, particularly within Moorhead. Tension which has arisen from “outsiders” recognition of the landform is a second social effect of the discourse, tension caused by feelings of pride but also feelings of proprietorship over the hills. Grappling with scientific facts as attempts are made to make sense of the “Loess Hills” is a third impact of the discourse, while resistance to science by working class residents is a fourth. An evolving collective identity for residents in the region is an additional result of the discourse. Finally, *an* identity has been given to resident’s, for with the name “Loess Hills,” Western Iowa has been introduced to the world (or at least the rest of Iowa).

All of these social consequences are recent phenomena for the area, and can be attributed to the placement of the name “Loess Hills” upon the landform. For with the “new” name of the “Loess Hills” brought about by the discourse, come new questions.

“Company’s Coming”

There have been several hints throughout the dissertation thus far that the hills were not always seen by residents in the same light they are now. When I asked Ted what he thought of the hills while growing up, he responded, “Well, you didn’t really think about it cuz they were just there. They were just part of your environment and you accepted it.” Grant told me when he first heard the term “loess” (while attending Iowa State University), “It didn’t mean anything. I was born and raised here. I’m the fourth generation that’s lived here, and it was just the way things were.” But then Grant altered his answer by saying “I guess it made me realize that there’s something special here, and maybe before I didn’t.”

Mountains, to which the hills have been compared by some, were not always seen in the way most individuals perceive them now. In her book, *Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory*, Marjorie Nicolson writes that “...mountains, upon which modern poets have lavished their most extravagant rhetoric, were for centuries described—when they were described at all—at best in conventional and unexciting imagery, at worst in terms of distaste and repulsion.”¹ As mountains have gone from being scary, and gloomy to majestic, so too have the hills gone from something that “was just there,” Bertha from Moorhead told me to

“they’re something else.” With the discourse, social construction of a landform occurred.

The constitution of the Loess Hills has resulted in several physical changes. Loess Hills Scenic Byway signs greet those on various county roads in Monona County, as does Turin’s sign, “Heart of the Loess Hills.” Both are physical indicators to those wandering the roads of the pride and attachment to the landform some individuals have taken on. This is seen most clearly in the community of Moorhead.

Main street Moorhead, with its’ “We Welcome You” or “Celebrate the Hills” banners indicate the hills identity—a source of pride—some have chosen to take on. They have not only taken this on for themselves, but for their community. The various signs and activity in the town reveal the promotion by (at least some of) the community members of its physical landscape, promotion which has changed this community, both physically and socially.

Postcards, calendars of the hills, and limited edition plates with hill etchings are for sale at the Cultural Center and Hospitality Association. They can also be picked up at the Blue Bonnet Cafe, owned by Phyllis and Steve, once professional truck drivers, and now cafe owners and active supporters of the local tourism. All these items reflect the pride and identity associated with the area’s landscape, as does Moorhead’s town festival. After the “Land of the Fragile Giants” art exhibit in 1994, Moorhead changed it’s annual festival from “Crabgrass Days” (named so, say residents, because Moorhead lawns are full of crabgrass) to “Celebration of the Hills.” Town festivals often express rural community values in consciously chosen symbols, and serve as a “celebration of sense of place, of uniqueness, of worth.” as Fred Schroeder has described in his work on small towns.²

This “celebration of uniqueness” has aided in re-igniting and maintaining a sense of community. And I believe tourism activities initiated in the dominant discourse have been the primary catalyst for this. This community renewal has occurred in several major ways, starting with the training of local tour guides in 1989, and continuing with a core of volunteers (but always seeking more!), and creation of public places.

Training of local tour guides began in 1989, with the beginning of the motorcoach tours. Willy and Norm were responsible for these initial trainings. When hiking with Willy, he told me when he did programs on the Loess Hills “we would get five people. When we

decided we were going to train guides for the Loess Hills Hospitality Association at the first meeting we had over 50 people.” I asked him why the difference.

“I think we had a lot more interest because it was presented in a different way. When we do environmental education programs, they think of them as being a conservation thing. When we did the tour guide, it was a social thing and kind of a civic thing. Learn about the Loess Hills, and then go brag about the Loess Hills to these people that get on the buses. People like to visit with other people,” Willy concluded. They had over 50 people because it provided a social gathering for the individuals and an opportunity to tell their stories about growing up and living in the area—to share their identity—and to gain a part in the discourse.

Lee and Luann have lived in the area since 1950. Lee was born in Mondamin, and grew up in Charter Oak. He is employed as a farm worker and Luann as a tour guide for the Hospitality Association. After 48 years living on Larpenteur Memorial Road, they have recently moved to Onawa. The eagerness by residents to share their stories—their identity—was confirmed by Luann when she told me, “I thought the sharing of it was great. Sharing and telling about it,” and Ted who said, “I like to have people come. Show off the hills and tell lies!”

The Fragile Giants exhibit also contributed to increased community within Moorhead, and many residents will note the attention from that is “what put them on the map.” “Marilyn’s art exhibit really started to turn things around,” Ted mentioned to me one December Saturday, while he and I sat in the Moorhead Community Center celebrating Christmas with the community, and waiting for Santa to arrive.

In the summer months, additional training occurs for the guides who travel to various towns to learn more about the town’s history and interesting facts they can share on the motorcoach. I attended these sessions the summer of 1997 and 1998. We toured such places as Logan County Courthouse and Jail (both on the National Register), walked some of the original Lincoln Highway in Woodbine, and listened to Harold tell the story of his dad Asa unearthing a human skeleton that became known as the “Turin Man.” The “Turin Man” was uncovered by Asa in a hill in Turin in 1955 and is considered both a major archeological discovery of the Paleolithic era and “significant as an example of Archaic burial practices”

according to Connie Mutel.³

After learning more about the “Turin Man,” or after any training session, we would have cookies and lemonade, hang out and talk. As I joined in on these, and got to know others who would attend, I realized I was becoming part of a community—a community which got together each month to gain and share information, and laugh. I was building social ties, and so were others.

The Loess Hills gift shop advertises as carrying “Loess Hills products made by Loess Hills artists.” I have been volunteering at the Hospitality Association when those who make items for sale come in. They are at times in awe that their crafts are sold, that they have enough value that money is paid for them. So the gift shop provides a source of additional (albeit limited) source of income, but more importantly, provides a venue for community members to express their identity, and receive a sense of worth.

Various opportunities to interact also exist for those who volunteer at the Cultural Center and Hospitality Association. At the end of the year, a Christmas get together is held in the Blue Bonnet Cafe. We sit and eat and talk and laugh, and share highlights of the past year from the Cultural Center and the Visitor’s Center activities. When it is time to open up the Visitor’s Center in early spring, a “spring fling” is held at the Blue Bonnet to welcome all the volunteers back.

Social activities also extend beyond those who volunteer and are tour guides to all community members. Monthly exhibits are held at the Cultural Center. Residents from the region are invited through local newspapers and word of mouth to submit exhibits, poetry and artwork for the annual “Celebrate the Hills” art festival, or simply to come see exhibits such as “4-H of Yesteryear and Today.” An annual Loess Hills Hospitality Association meeting is held, and again all are invited. Awards are given, stories are shared, but most importantly, people get together with others for a Sunday evening dinner (or lunch).⁴

Those involved in tourism activities also become tourists themselves. An annual bus trip is taken to nearby areas of interest. The trips have included the Reimann Gardens in Ames, the Sioux City Art Center, and Sergeant Floyd’s monument. According to the *Loess Hills Link*, (a newsletter which goes out to members of the Hospitality Association) this past

year's trip (their fourth annual) "was a day of adventure for 54 Loess Hills residents."

One clear social impact of the discourse, then, is the increase in community within Moorhead, with more reasons for community members to get together resulting from tourism. Tourism also has created stronger ties among those who already had close social relations, and "weak ties" among those who are acquaintances, but brought together through tourism activities.⁵ An additional set of "embedded" social relations within the community has been created.⁶

Public places have also been created. As I've already mentioned, the Overlook has become an area to meet others, an important public place. I made a point to go there frequently. There were always people from the area (and from outside the area) on and near it. In the summer months especially, individuals will be there having lunch, dinner, or simply watching the sun setting. It has provided a village green, a short distance from the village.

"I've been quite impressed with that lookout," Jacob told me. The Whiting Care Center he lives at takes its residents out there often, as do others in the area. "We went out to that Negro cemetery," referring to a small cemetery in Jordan Township, where approximately 20 individuals known as the "Adam Mier Black People" are buried, most in the late 1800's.

Jacob continued on with his story. "Then we went to the park [Preparation]. We had our lunch there and then we went to that lookout. And some of the residents here were able to go because it's got wheelchair accessibility." The discourses which have taken place over the landform have contributed to opening up the hills and the hills view to residents, and non-residents alike, with the Overlook.

One day while in town, Ellie encountered two out-of-town visitors who were heading to the overlook. "Two ladies from Sioux City stopped here and wanted to go out there and I said, 'Well, if you can stick around for about 20 minutes you can follow me out there.' One taught in a country school out here, and she had never been back down to Moorhead. She had heard about the Loess Hills in the paper and stuff." They headed to the Overlook.

"I went and got some ice tea and some glasses and we sat there and had a tea up there on that table. And then she [the former teacher] set there and reminisced and said that she

taught school there.” The discourse, an aspect of which has resulted in creation of the Overlook, has also assisted in bringing back pleasurable memories, the “ghosts of place” I mention in Chapter 3, “a felt presence that gives a sense of social aliveness” to the hills.⁷ The overlook is a “marker” of the present, contributing to reminiscing of “markers” of the past.

Public places and interaction with others are two essential aspects often missing in “community” these days, according to many who write on the subject. In his book *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg laments the demise of public places which facilitated informal public life. Informal public life is very powerful and necessary, Oldenburg argues, for creation and maintenance of community. We find informal public life in what Oldenburg calls “third places”—places we gather for companionship and conversation such as cafes, parks and bars. In other words, places we gather for informal social interaction.

Political scientist Robert Putnam and others argue without this interaction, there is no “social capital.” That is, there are few or no “networks, norms, and trust,” that are shared among individuals.⁸ While social capital and its aspects have contributed to an increased understanding of social relations, I and my colleague Mike Bell prefer a simpler term: community.⁹ The interaction which takes place in informal public places—places where we tend to just “hang out”—contributes to “community,” the feelings of closeness and trust we have with others.

Residents’ increased involvement in the community has clearly changed Moorhead, physically and socially. The Loess Hills Cultural Center and Loess Hills Hospitality Association not only filled two empty storefronts, they provided two more spots for (some) community members to get together, help on various projects, and mingle with each other. Residents stop in to see “what’s going on.” They see a familiar face, and drop in to say “hi.” These two spaces, along with the Overlook, help to provide the community needed interaction in public places.

The impact of tourism has also benefited one of the most important rural institutions—churches. Ladies church groups provide “dinner” (noon meal) for those tourists on the motorcoaches. One dinner garners more money than any other event the church holds during the year. Lila, one of the several cooks, told me, “We’re always trying to raise some

funds one way or another to support the church. We don't have a big enough membership hardly to support them and so this is one way. This has really been a good thing for the organizations." Joyce, another volunteer cook, also indicated the positives which have come from serving the meals. "Through the bus trips we have put new foundations under churches. We have replaced stained glass windows, sent money to the missions. We've generated a lot of money in this local area through the Loess Hills." With the loss of population in rural areas, a concern noted by residents in Chapter 3, rural churches have suffered. The constituting of the Loess Hills has alleviated a bit of rural America's problems.

Those who live in Moorhead would often comment to me on the community's new viability, which they attribute to the attention being placed on the hills. Liz, the Moorhead postmaster, told me the first day I met her, "it's so nice to see Moorhead without any empty storefronts," pointing out the Hospitality Association across the street, and mentioning the Cultural Center just up the block. Main street Moorhead *is* impressive and it caught my eye the first time I saw it in 1994. After all I'd been reading about small towns and demise of community, the flurry of activity in Moorhead impressed me.

Vernon warned me not to be fooled, noting, "Moorhead wasn't always like this. That is, a community which works together. But little by little, getting groups together working on things, it has culminated in the community working together." Groups working together has resulted in the community working together more. Ties among groups have helped to strengthen the community. The power of the discourses and social effects they have on Moorhead are quite positive, showing power need not only have negative connotations.

The stories just told show renewal in community both economically and socially. The resident's readily identify this. While Ginger noted she'd be just as happy living in the area "even if it wasn't the Loess Hills," she did realize, "There is some advantage that we have with being in the unique hills like this. So many of the little towns around here, they're just holding up, or they're just gone. And by having things going on and the volunteers and people interacting..." she let the thought dangle. "I'll hear the comment, 'Well, it's fun to come to Moorhead because somebody'll talk to ya and there's somethin' goin' on.' And there is. There's people around, you know. You don't get that isolated feeling maybe. And so I

see,” she continued, “that this [tourism] is an advantage to making a better life.”

Naomi lives in Moorhead and is a volunteer at both the Hospitality Association and the Cultural Center. She grew up in Moorhead and taught both at a country school and grade school in town. One winter day in 1997, sitting warmly in her house, she and I ate Danish treats, drank coffee and talked about living in the hills. Before wrapping up with Naomi I asked her if there was anything else she wanted to say. “I’ll only say this,” she concluded. “I think the fact of the Loess Hill promotion, plus our little gift shop, and plus the Cultural Center, has really kept Moorhead going better than it would have without it. I don’t think there’s any question about that it’s helped Moorhead. I really do think that.”

Others from outside of Moorhead have also commented on the changes that have taken place in Moorhead. One of my first days out to the hills I sat with Arlene, Ralph and Charles, all from Soldier. They were telling me what the tourism activities had done for the area, especially Moorhead. “It has done wonders for Moorhead. They’ve really cleaned that place up, put in sidewalks, and I really think the Loess Hills has had a lot to do with that. That has helped the cafe. It has also restored pride in the community. I don’t think Moorhead would have a centennial if it wasn’t for this Loess Hills thing. I got the sense they kinda laughed at us when Soldier did [held their centennial].”¹⁰

Connie Mutel described one night she was looking for a place to stay. “When I was there in the late 1980s, that place [Moorhead] was dead. I mean dead. I remember going to Moorhead, because it was a cold, rainy night and I thought there’s gotta be someplace, and it was like 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon and there was nobody. I would look for faces in the windows. No faces in the windows. There weren’t any cafes there or any businesses at all. All the storefronts were shut and you felt that there was a spirit of death in that town.”

Connie returned to the area after publication of *Fragile Giants*. By then, “Land of the Fragile Giants” art exhibit and the motorcoach tours had been introduced in the area. Connie told me, “I felt incredible joy when I went back and saw people out in the streets.”

Penny also commented on what attention has done for the community. “Once they started with the Loess Hills Hospitality Association and the tours, buildings got torn down that needed to be torn down, buildings got put up. It was kind of a clean up, paint up, fix up

that was quite a facelift for Moorhead. I mean the town was different visually.”

I remarked that I wish I had seen it before the attention started. “It was bad,” Penny assured me. “I mean you just kind of pulled in and ohhhhh. We all do that at home,” she reasoned, “where you might leave some things, some books or magazines stacked when it’s just you coming in and out. But when you know company’s coming, most of us do a couple of extra things. And I view that in the community. What happened was ‘oh, these people actually are coming in and they want to see how we live and learn about the hills and learn about us and so they kind of got cleaned up and fixed up because company was coming. And it’s been, I think, a benefit, not only to visitors but the people who live there.”

“Company coming” to the hills *has* benefited Moorhead in several ways—to the community as a defined place, and to the sense of community. Physically, Mainstreet Moorhead has improved, with the establishment of new businesses and cleaning up of the town. Socially, ties have been created and maintained, as individuals work together on promotion of the hills, and participate increasingly in discourses about the hills.

“A fine line”

There is another side to the attention brought about by the discourses, one that has less than favorable social consequences. While Ginger remarked on all the economic and social benefits she saw tourism having for the community of Moorhead, she also added a caveat. “There’s a fine line there, between how much it would go the other way as far as being exploited or getting too big, because we do kind of like our little quiet life too.”

Malinda, too, added a caveat in our conversation about all the good things the outside attention has brought. “There’s a lot of people that won’t be associated with a Loess Hills office because they are promoting the hills and bringing people in. They’re not for that. There is that element,” Malinda told me as she and I sat in the Cultural Center and talked. I had been curious about why some residents chose not to be involved. Malinda believed the bringing of people (that is, “outsiders”) in, was the reason. “That’s why some aren’t involved. They just fall back and just don’t participate. Now those people support this Center but they won’t that one,” motioning across the street to the Hospitality Association. I asked why. “Because they don’t want to see other people coming in and spoiling this rural solitude

so to speak.”

The rural identity holds strong, as already seen in Chapter 3. This identity occurs at both the individual level, and the collective level. There is a clear distinction between “locals” and those “not local.” Those who are local are rural people.

Tension between “outsiders” and “locals” is not a new issue to the area but it is one which has intensified in the area due to the discourses, and what they have produced—“Outsiders.” “Outsiders” are not only tourists but anyone coming into the area and changing the social fabric, or threatening to do so. Rightly or wrongly, residents attribute any outsider coming in to the increased recognition of the landform.

The attention being given to the hills is causing tension for residents as they struggle between the sense of proprietorship they have towards the landform—which gives them their “rural identity,” their “rural solitude” and “little quiet life”—and the feeling they “should share” the view. The tension is caused as “outsiders” must penetrate the hills if the hills are to be a source of pride, but their penetrating undermines the “us-ness” those in the hills feel.

Joe, a farmer from Castana, took me out on his All Terrain Vehicle on a tour of his and his families’ farm. As we rode over the valleys and through the pastures, I asked Joe if he and many of the farmers in the area talk about the attention the hills are getting. “Oh, a bit,” he said. “They’ve heard about it, but they don’t know what it means.” Joe added, “Much to our chagrin, the place *is* getting attention. We like to think they’re *our* hills.” After a minute he turned to me as I rode on the back, and said somewhat apologetically, “I suppose that’s not right, I suppose we should share them.”

“Share” was a specific term used by many residents I talked with. There is a felt obligation the landform should be shared, but concern over what this will do. In a few moments, I understood why Joe felt chagrined that the hills were being recognized. We rode by some land adjacent to their farm. He and his family had been interested in purchasing it for pasture, but the price was pushed up too high for them, by “lawyers and doctors from Omaha who want to buy it for hunting.”

A bit later, Joe took me to where the State ground abutted their pastureland. The fence dividing the pasture and State land wasn’t necessary to show where the property lines

were. The adjacent state land was thick with brush. Joe's pasture on the other side of the fence looked much greener, and easier to walk through.

Joe then showed me a nice walnut tree, with several big spikes driven into it. A metal chair hung on one of the spikes. A hunter had crossed the fence and put spikes that could be used as steps to the deer stand, into the tree. It wasn't so much the loss of the value of the tree that bothered Joe. It was the fact someone would do it. And to top the insult off, the hunter left their folding chair on one of the spikes, as if to say, "I'll be back, and I don't really care whose land this is." Attracting hunters who can't hunt in the thick brush is just one problem with the State land, according to Joe. The undergrowth which was being encouraged ignored the fence and was beginning to come into his pastureland, land he and his family have worked on keeping "clean" and are proud of doing so, for it identifies them as "good farmers."

Non-local hunters and the State are two groups of "outsiders." Most residents as well as the DNR wildlife biologist who oversees management of the Loess Hills Wildlife Area readily state this. These "outsiders" are creating problems within the hills. They are both competing for agricultural land, and therefore threatening the farming lifestyle.

It was also the States' activities that had Mike thinking about attention coming to the area. "It'll come out in conversation with farmers on why did the DNR buy Harry Rice some real good bottomground and trade him for that hillground. You've heard of that," he told me, knowing I had as it's a very popular story in the area. Land for the State Forest was bought or traded from willing farmers, Harry Rice being one of them.

Mike went on. "See, in reality, what they've done is they've driven the land values up. They paid an astronomical price for some ground that really isn't too valuable for timberground. From different stories I've heard, they're payin' as much for timberground that's non-revenue generating than some people are payin' for productive cropland. Well, that has an effect on everybody's values around. But yet, they turn around and they don't pay any taxes. It's good for the guys to sell to 'em. But the other guy that might be interested in buyin', it just put him out of business. Or it just stopped his hopes."

A decreased tax base for the county is a looming concern, because of the low wages

in the county. As Willy often says, “the hills are a double-edged sword. Monona County has 49% hills and 51% bottom. The hills are beautiful to have, but they don’t generate tax revenue for us.”

“It’s not talk in the coffee shops,” Clint from Onawa told me, as I tried to gauge how much residents were talking about the hills. “We talk about how much our beans are gonna bring or how much the land rents for or if somebody has a sale over there, what the sale brought. If you do hear talk of anything, for instance, when the State buys some ground over there, it’s usually negative. That was always a big bone of contention with some of the guys that own land over there cuz the State would buy the ground with tax money, they wouldn’t maintain it, they wouldn’t take care of the fences, they wouldn’t burn it properly and take care of it so the cedars would take over. And then, of course, we’d take the land off the tax roles. That just throws a higher tax burden on your neighbor, you know, on somebody else.”¹¹

“Driving up land values,” and taking land out of circulation, are two specifically sore spots for hill farmers who believe, as we’ve seen, they need to continue adding land to “stay competitive” in today’s agricultural world. These sore spots contribute to the farmers’ resentment felt towards the discourses, and their being left out of it, as I note in Chapter 3. There is an unequal balance of voices in the discourses, and an unequal balance of power. Farmers know their voices are some of the least heard.

As the State’s role in the discourse has contributed to recollections of pleasurable memories of the past, as seen with the Overlook, it has also resulted in bittersweet memories of the past. Once pleasurable memories various residents recalled of the land now in the State’s hands are recalled in unpleasant tones, echoing Tony Hiss’ comments on the “fading” and “discoloration” of places he heard in recollections of places.

A portion of Libby and Bob’s land abuts a section of DNR managed Wildlife Area. “It is absolutely no advantage that I know of to have the State ground over here, do you know of any?” Libby asked me.

I suggested, “I think one thing they would probably say is they’re buying the land to preserve it, to preserve the hills.”

“But for what?” Libby asked.

“Well,” I responded, “what I’ve heard is it’s a unique area. Down near Council Bluffs they’re bulldozing a lot of ‘em for landfill. So that’s probably one of the reasons they would give is that they wanna preserve ‘em.”

“Well, we’ve always lived off the land, and if you can’t take care of it, well, you better not use it, I guess! But I think it’s here for a purpose. I don’t wanna see it abused either. But I don’t think they’re improving it that much, you know.”

Then Libby told me how they once used the State land. “We used to go right through our fence and along that creek, there used to be raspberries galore, and it was all bluegrass. You could just walk along, you could lay down your blankets and have a picnic lunch and pick raspberries. Well, you could no more do that than anything. Now is that improving it? I don’t know.”

Harry from Turin shared similar thoughts with me. “I get a little funny feeling when the State buys this land. They say ‘we wanna preserve it like it was.’ Well, the people that was livin’ on it was takin’ better care of it than they are. They don’t do anything with it. And the State and anybody that wants to can go walk on it and hunt and things like that. But no one wants to because it’s all brush. Our pastureland is clearer than theirs. That’s the truth,” he added with conviction. “It’d be way better off if everybody lived there and had a few cows.”

Harry then told me of a piece of land that used to be in his family. “I went back to that piece that I used to roam. When I was young, I rode it day in and day out with the horses. It belonged to my great-grandfather and grandfather both. And after my dad and his brother sold it, why I waited about 10 years, and I thought by gosh, I’ll go back over where I used to ride. And by that time I couldn’t walk through it, I couldn’t see nuthin’. I never went back cuz it was no use. But, it’s just progress you know,” he said somewhat resignedly. “They want to preserve this. I don’t see why they’re preserving it but then it don’t matter to me.” But it does matter to Harry, and to Libby, and to others. Their heritage is worked into this land, some of which once “belonged” to the residents. A part of the residents’ past is gone with the State’s activities, and with this goes parts of residents’ heritage, history and

identity.

In the 1980's, as noted in Chapter 2, much of the State land was purchased for hunting purposes, one of the major goals of the former DNR director. Iowa is consistently "one of the top five states for producing deer with huge antlers," according to a DNR official.¹² Monona County is one of the top ten counties in Iowa for trophy rack hunting.

Hunters use the land for recreation, and therefore are considered a type of tourist. Bed and Breakfast businesses and lodges in the area now advertise to out-of-state hunters, encouraging them to come to the hills. Hunters are also being brought in by "outfitters" like Bud who was in the Watering Hole that April evening we discussed "catsteps." These hunters are usually from out-of-state, and are all middle class. And they are perceived as taking away the rights of working class locals.

"That's another thing that kind of bothers me, the commercialism of the hunting," Clint offered, when talking about "outsiders" coming in. "These guys that are kind of 'professional guides,' they're leasing large tracts of land and then charging ungodly rates for people to come in and hunt. I don't blame the farmers," he said as he continued. "A lot of 'em own ground which is not productive dollar-wise. And in many cases, if they don't have stock cattle, they don't get any revenues off of 'em. So, the only revenues they can get off it is to lease it out to somebody to go hunting. And some of these guys will pay some pretty good bucks for that. So you can't hardly blame them," Clint repeated.

Some working class farmers are looking for ways to diversify their income. Renting their land to outfitters is one such way. They are not the ones blamed for taking away "insiders" freedom to roam. It is the ones bringing in the hunters—the outsiders—who are responsible for this.

Ted also brought up the discussion of hunting when discussing "outsiders" coming in. "There'll be a lot of locals who say the hills shouldn't be commercialized. I've had neighbors say that they don't want intruders into their home"—"their home" being the hills region.

Ted continued. "Just like 'pay to hunt' situations that are developing now. In a fairly major scale right around us. And I have real mixed emotions about that. I can understand

how somebody that really is a dedicated hunter and wants to hunt is willing to spend some bucks for a place that he knows will be good.”

“They live in the city,” Berry commented.

“But on the other hand, I like to hunt and it’s always been kind of a free thing and I hate to see it go commercial. And they look on this tourism as commercializing and intruding on their home. A lot of people, especially in the hills, just wanna be left alone.”

When a tract is leased to a “professional guide,” it becomes off limits to anyone else. “No trespassing” signs are clearly posted, as well as signs designating what Outfitter has leased the land. In the case of hunting, “outsiders” are perceived as taking away a right from the residents, the freedom to hunt the hills. These outsiders are wealthy and urban dwellers. “They live in the city” said Berry, and they’re “lawyers and doctors from Omaha,” Joe told me earlier. Outsiders are beginning to compete, as is the State, for land—resulting in land prices being driven beyond what working class farmers can pay. A class issue is once again being played out in the landform, and this time assisted by “outsiders” in the discourse.

While some residents pinpoint the State’s and hunter’s activities, others identify the motorcoach tours and drive-through tourists when discussing their concerns about “outsiders.” Gigi is a naturalist for Monona County Conservation Board. She is from central Iowa and has been in the area since the 70s. When Gigi and I sat and talked while she tended the County Conservation Booth at the Monona County Fair, she told me of her concerns about tourism. She was asked to serve on the Loess Hills Hospitality Board but declined, stating she wasn’t too sure about promoting tourism. She explained her reasons.

“As an individual that lives in the hills and loves the peace and quiet, it makes it really difficult to think that that’s going to be interrupted. And I’m domestic. What’s it gonna do to wildlife? I understand that economically wise Moorhead, being a small town, that they would welcome an opportunity for growth. And I understand that perfectly well,” she reasoned. “I’m just pretty darned selfish. I don’t want it to be interrupted. And there will be a disturbance to the natural order of things regardless of how careful we all are. I see the buses go by. It’s more traffic. And yet,” she paused and said, “I have mixed feelings because I think it’s a wonderful thing to share. I think it’s wrong for us to not share it with

people. If you could select who to have come in, it'd be okay. And so I'm torn," she concluded, showing the tension between wanting to share, but fear over what the sharing will do. Gigi wants to be democratic, she wants to open up the hills, but only to certain types of people. For Gigi these are people who will treat the area with respect.

Gigi was concerned about how she was coming across in our conversation. "It sounds like I'm really opposed to havin' people come in and that's not necessarily the case. I just think we need to proceed real cautiously about it when we do it. And I feel like they're goin' pretty gung-ho right now and maybe not looking at the impact."

"Who do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, it sounds to me like there's a lot of different ideas. So I don't know who all's responsible but I see a lot more happening in the hills. I think State ground promotes more hunting. I think the Hospitality Association's advertising and everything promotes tourism. So those are two different things that are bringing people in. And they're gonna be tellin' people about it. 'Wow, we went here. Saw this, saw that.' So then it's just kind of like a snowball effect," identifying various actors in the discourses and what their impacts are having on her home.

Other residents also experience this tension. between feeling pride and the need and desire to share, but also feeling a sense of proprietorship over their hills. Joe mentioned it earlier when he told me he and others like to think "they're our hills," then noted shortly after he should "share them."

"I'm selfish," Norm said, an active actor in the initial discourse. "That's why I say to people, 'I want you to get on a bus. I want you to come and visit. I want to educate you about what we have here. I want you to go home with something that you will tell your neighbor at coffee that you saw or that you experienced. But I want you to go home. I really want you to go home,'" he insisted. "I'm being very, very selfish in these comments in the respect that I was born and raised here. I love the area for what it is."

What the area is, is "rural America," "peaceful," and "isolated." It is also a source of identity for the residents, who are increasingly becoming concerned about the recognition of the landform. After Emma and I returned from seeing her dad Jacob, we sat for a bit and

talked. Emma was also not sure how she felt about tourism. “So we get tourists in for the gift shop, is that good?” she asked. I didn’t have a good answer, but certainly understood her concern. “It used to be a sleepy little area and now it isn’t.” She paused and turned to me with a half-smile and said, “I kinda wish it was a sleepy little area again,” yearning for the days when the hills were “the hills.”

Nan was “amazed” at the number of cars which drive by on the Scenic Byway, and feels “people just wanna get away from too many people. And I think that’s one of the unique things here.” Then she added, “I hope it doesn’t change. It’s apt to change if we bring in too many tourists, and that will take the fun out of, for a lot of people, driving through the Loess Hills.”

I asked them what they thought about the tourism going on in the area. “It’s a beautiful area,” Grant began, “I’m happy to share it. As long as having these people come in doesn’t change what’s good about the area. And I’m concerned about that.”

“Do you think it has already?” I wondered.

Both Nan and Grant agreed, “no.” But they also agreed some things *had* changed because of it. I mentioned in chapter 2 they live on the Scenic Byway, part of the more heavily traveled section as it leads to Preparation Canyon and the Overlook. They are “proud” to be on a road designated as such, but Grant also noted, “It is a different experience. I mean, we like to get our Sunday paper and eat our breakfast at the dining room table. And we feel secluded and then we look up and there’s a Greyhound bus going by and the lady’s on the microphone up front, and they’re all looking expectantly and we always smile and wave.” Nan added, “We’re always dressed anymore when we go out!”

Slight alterations to residents’ lives are beginning to take place. The issue of what will become of the hills is one residents increasingly discuss. It is an issue that now has to be thought about, because the Loess Hills have been constituted.

Potential threats to the rural identity include not only tourists and government, but also “foreigners,” a third group of identified “outsiders.” As Selma and I sat one day, she told me of concerns she had heard expressed about the motorcoach tours. “A lot of people have said to me, ‘I hope this isn’t doin’ the wrong thing by havin’ these tours and stuff.’ Like

people movin' back and changin' the atmosphere around here. I've heard several different people say, 'Well, I just hope the Mexicans or the Japanese or something don't start movin' in and ruin what it looks like around here.'"

"They'd ruin it by..." I asked, looking for specifics.

"Not taking care of it," Selma said. "But I don't think so. I said I have seen up at Denison and different places like Onawa, you see Indians and Mexicans and stuff, but I don't think we ever will in Moorhead or Soldier."

"How come?" I wondered.

"I don't know. Maybe it's cuz I think that they can sense that people around here don't want foreigners. I just hope it never gets where it's invaded by somebody who doesn't respect it."

"Do you think that's happening?"

"No, not yet. Not yet. But down the road a ways, it could be. Because, I think the people in the cities, if they haven't got a good job, they're going to move on and think that they can come to a small community and if they don't have any money they won't help out with, you know, buyin' acreage's or something like that. But after you live here this long, you respect the town, you respect the people that's here, and you just wanna keep it that way. You just wanna keep it that way," she repeated.

Keeping it "that way" means keeping this part of "Rural America" a "white space,"¹³ and an "American space." Racism and the desire for an ethnically homogenous community are beginning to result in drawing of boundaries. These boundaries have specific lines for who should be allowed, and who should not be allowed in. There is a "fine line" residents don't want crossed. For some, this means they don't want their rural ideal ruined.

Grappling with Science

Several elements constitute the role that science has played in the region. As I have noted previously, the term “Loess Hills” is itself a scientific term. And with the introduction of this term by those involved in the discourses, came attempts by residents to comprehend it—to get the pronunciation “correct,” the meaning understood, and the scientific “facts” attached to it straight.

One day as I rode with Lee in the grain truck to the Blencoe Coop we talked about the hills. He told me that he grew up in Charter Oak, “not in the Loess Hills,” and Luann was the “one who lived in the Loess Hills because she’s from Climbing Hills.” As the three of us sat in their newly acquired home in town and talked, I reminded Lee about his comment that he “didn’t live in the Loess Hills.”

“Well, now they do consider it to be the Loess Hills,” he replied, “but we never considered that to be part of ‘em at that time.” Luann joined in. “Well, even as a kid, when I went to school right in there, we never really knew about the Loess Hills.”

“So when did you first hear the term?” I wondered.

“Boy, that’s just been lately,” responded Lee, to which Luann agreed. “It hasn’t been that long ago. It was,” she paused, thought then added, “well, they had that tavern in Turin that they named the ‘Loess Hills Inn,’” in the late 1970s.

“So the first time you heard the term Loess Hills was...” I began. “Back about then,” said Lee. “Well, that’s when it really became popular to us. We kind of knew Loess Hills but it was nothing, it was no big deal at that time,” elaborated Luann.

“Nobody ever said anything about ‘em before,” echoed Lee. “To us it was just dirt. It was just a type of soil.”

“They were just dirt,” Lee noted. But through the discourses, the hills have become a source of identity, and have gone from “just dirt” to dirt that individuals are proud to link themselves with.

While talking with Luann and Lee they also commented on the pronunciation of the term. I asked them if there was a correct pronunciation. “Well, they say ‘luss,’” stated Luann and Lee echoed, “They say ‘luss’ now but...” inferring at some point, not “now,” they didn’t say “‘luss.’”

“Now who’s ‘they?’” I wondered.

“Well, where I took my training lessons for tour guide which would be Willy. The people from Moorhead, you know, the ones that really got it up, they want it called ‘luss.’ But even when the tavern was in Turin, we was told then it was ‘luss,’ not ‘lo-ess.’ German pronunciation,” Luann clarified.

I wondered what they called the area now. “Well, we do call it the Loess Hills area.” Luann said. “When we’re talking to friends or describing things, we do go ahead and explain that the only other one is in China. And we’re very proud of it,” she noted with a smile.

Lee and Luann’s comments are indicative of many I heard regarding the term. Their comments show issues of identity, of pronunciation, and the scientific facts surrounding the landform. These include the general feeling that “the hills” were “no big deal” at one time, “just dirt,” and the relative recency of the term. But the hills became important enough for identity that a way to pronounce them had to be found. The hills also evolved from “no big deal” to “we’re very proud of them” in part because of the scientific facts such as “the only other one is in China.” Those with power in the discourse, such as Willy, are the sanctioned voices which are providing the scientific “facts.” The “habits of thought” of discourse, that are taken to be true, is seen in the residents’ acceptance of the voice of scientists.

When and from whom the residents first heard the term varies. Lee and Luann were one of the few I talked with who heard the term more than 20 years ago. For some, the term is very new. As Ellie and I sat in her kitchen, I wondered when she first heard the term. Ellie motioned down the hill towards main street and the Hospitality Association, saying “We just called it ‘the hills.’ And it’s just since they started the shop down here.” Malinda, who coordinated the Land of the Fragile Giants art exhibit, told me she first heard the term, “for the exhibit, in 1993.” For others, like Lee and Luann, the term has been laying around for a while, but did not receive attention until the discourse broadened.

While Jacob, Emma and I sat and talked, Jacob told me he didn’t know when he first heard “Loess Hills.” “We knew that that’s what they were called,” he explained, “but there was no particular interest in that...They told us this was a unique area. That there was only one other area supposedly that large similar to it and that was in China.”

"I'm not sure when we became aware of that," Emma joined in. "But it's more recent. Even though I think I probably knew they were wind blown soil, I'm just not sure when that term "Loess Hills" came around." Jacob added, "When I was young, I don't recall anybody sayin' that. Only just 'hills' and 'bluffs.'"

"That's just been in the last, how many years?" Carol asked Mike, while we sat in their living room and they pondered when they first heard the term.

"I'd say probably the last 25 years," Mike guessed. "At the most," Carol stated.

"I'd heard about the Loess Hills, the wind blown soil, and the only other place like that's in China. I think, or somethin' like that," Mike said undecidedly. "But it's just been probably in the last 15 or so years that people here in this area have really paid more attention," Mike elaborated. I asked them if they could remember where they heard it from, but both shook their heads "no."

"Well, you know, it just kind of cropped up," Libby told me when I inquired about the term. While for some it did just kind of "crop up," it received much fertilization with the local tourism efforts active in the initial discourse.

As Nan and Grant thought about their introduction to the term "Loess Hills," Nan noted, "I cannot even think of when we would've heard..."

"Comparatively recently," Grant joined in.

"Recently, yes." Nan agreed. Grant thought some more and added, "I think the term 'Loess Hills' maybe had been born about the same time the interest in tourism started." After a few more seconds Grant asked, "could Trace have had something to do with it?"

Nan and Grant's remarks echo what many others have said earlier. I mention in chapter 2 it was Trace's name more than any others in the area that was associated with the "Loess Hills." If Trace's name is not identified, most often a reference to "what's going on up there in Moorhead," inferring the Loess Hills Hospitality Association, is the source which introduced the term to residents.

Charles from Soldier told me that he first heard the term "only about 5 years ago. Oh, I knew the word 'loess,'" he explained further, "but I never associated that with the hills. In fact, I never even gave a thought of how these hills were formed until I came back and," he

paused and said, “well, I guess the tourism from the Loess Hills Association gave me a lot of that information.”

I was curious why and how Trace came to choose the name *Loess Hills* Hospitality Association. While cutting away at onions in his kitchen his answer to my pondering was “the Loess Hills because that’s what they are. Hospitality because that’s what we do best in rural America.” (“Hospitality” is a theme I elaborate further upon in chapter 5).

“Who did you first hear the term ‘Loess Hills’ from?” I asked.

He stopped cutting, stared out the kitchen window, and had to think for a minute. “Desiree,” he said eventually. “Desiree showed me the book Connie Mutel had written,” referring to the *Fragile Giants*.

And with Trace’s comment the route scientific information has taken to the residents is made a bit more clear. Science plays a largely invisible role in these residents’ eyes and in society. Science is part of the web of power/knowledge, but not always consciously thought about.

There are two paths scientific information has taken. Those who were active in the Hospitality Association were introduced to the term by Trace, and given specifics on the meaning of the term primarily by the scientists at the local level, Willy and Norm. Even though County Conservation Directors Willy and Norm noted they had been doing sessions on the Loess Hills for 20 years, they both readily admit it wasn’t until the tourism activities that the local people began to take notice of the term.

Science’s role was made more visible by the Hospitality Association when the term began to be used in the late 1980’s. Those not active in the Hospitality Association (the majority of residents) received scientific information through the Hospitality Association efforts.

While not part of the hill vernacular, “Loess Hills” has been accepted to some degree, and the name taken on, as I indicated in chapter 1. Besides the Loess Hills Hospitality Association, Cultural Center, and Scenic Byway, there are now several businesses that have claimed the identity. Towns also use the term for promotion, with several maintaining they are the true center of the hills. Turin proclaims it is in “the heart of the Loess Hills” as does

Missouri Valley, stating proudly on its tourism pamphlet, “Located in the heart of the Loess Hills overlooking the Missouri River Valley.” Contained within the 1997 Sioux City phonebook is a description of the city’s amenities, a description that includes “The Loess Hills are composed of fine yellow soil of wind blown silt found only in the Sioux City area and in China.” Those residents who attach pride to the term, and/or want to promote it in various ways, have grabbed the term and applied it.

One main fact often included in a discussion of loess includes the “correct” pronunciation. It is difficult to identify with something one can’t pronounce. Thus residents grapple with the pronunciation as they increasingly choose to identify with the term.

“Have you noticed the different pronunciations?” Grant asked me. “There’s ‘lo-ess’ and there’s ‘luss’ and the way you’d even say the word varies widely,” introducing a second effect science has brought—uncertainty and debate over the pronunciation. This has already been hinted at by several individuals. When production began on “Land Between Two Rivers” Tom Moore noted, “I didn’t even know how to pronounce it and neither did anyone else. That was a controversy early on.” Closer to the region, Carol from Castana also discussed a common reaction upon hearing the term, “A group of us, we were kind of laughing, not even sure how to pronounce it.”

Different individuals, groups and publications will suggest there *is* a correct pronunciation. The inside cover of the Loess Hills calendar, put out by the Hospitality Association reads “The ancient prairie hills, a unique natural wonder, were formed over 18,000 years ago of wind blown soil called ‘loess’ (pronounced ‘luss’).” A 1994 *Des Moines Register* article offers differing pronunciations depending on locality. “Loess—meaning wind blown, and pronounced ‘luss’ in Iowa, ‘lerce’ in parts of Nebraska.”¹⁴ And the latest *Iowa’s Loess Hills Scenic Byway* brochure, produced by Golden Hills RC&D, welcomes tourists and explains the hills to them, noting “Although deposits of loess, which are wind blown soils pronounced ‘luss,’ are found across the world, nowhere else but China do they reach as high as here.”

There are some residents who readily accept the pronunciation, accept the scientists’ voices and change their own pronunciation of the term if it differs—indicating the conviction

with which they have chosen this identity. These residents most often are those involved in promotion of the hills and now call it 'luss' and most often they, like Luann, cite conservation officials or physical scientists as their source.

"Why do you call it the 'luss' hills," I asked Bertha one day while she was trying to coordinate tours and I was bothering her with more questions.

"That's what we were told to call it," she replied kindly.

"Who told you that?" I wondered.

"Those in power," she responded, then elaborated on who "those in power" are. "The conservation folks told us, and then the powers that be, the geologists I guess, said what the correct pronunciation is."

Those involved in the dominant discourse in Chapter 2, are *given* the power by some residents, and by the Hospitality Association, to decide pronunciation. Therefore, those in the dominant discourse are *given* the power to decide identity of these residents. The conservation folks and geologists' voices are readily accepted, as are the power positions that accompany these voices.

My conversation with Naomi from Moorhead turned to pronunciation. Naomi told me, "I pronounce it 'luss.' And I believe this is the correct way. I have heard other names—'loose.' 'lōse'—but I think the correct way is 'luss.' I think as we studied as [tour] guides it was made known to us that it was 'luss.'" I wondered who it was that Naomi heard this from.

"[People] like [Willy]. And, of course, all the literature will tell you its pronounced 'luss.'" "Education" on the pronunciation has come through in several ways, by individuals and by literature. But with all this, there is an acceptance that there is a correct way, and the authority is "those in power."

If residents' pronunciation differs, some will readily change to the "correct" way. Ted told me before the tourism efforts began he called them "'lo-ess.'" Berry agreed, noting "now we call 'em the Loess Hills. We used to call 'em the 'lo-ess' hills. And I guess we've become educated," explaining why they changed their pronunciation.

"Is pronunciation important?" I asked Berry. And while she responded, "Not to me.

Not to most of us, I don't think," she indicated there was a "correct" pronunciation as she said, "More and more people do pronounce it right I notice. It's getting better."

For Norm, the pronunciation is very important. "Isn't it important that you correctly pronounce a person's name?" he asked, hitting a tender spot for me.

"If you go to the origin of the word you will find that the German pronunciation was 'luss.' I don't know how you make the 'löse' or 'lurse.' It's 'luss.' I don't want to mispronounce your name, I don't think you mispronounce the name of a world class geologic formation," he clarified.

Pronunciation is very important to my name, what I consider my strongest identity. Identity with the Loess Hills has also become very strong for some residents, strong enough to assert there *is* a correct pronunciation, important for the purposes of identity and the intimate attachment some residents, like Norm, have to the landform.

"What do you do when people say it differently?" I asked.

"I correct 'em." Norm responded. "But then again, if you would look at it in a larger picture and say, 'What the hell difference does it make whether they pronounce it 'luss' or 'lurse' or whatever. If they come and we can teach 'em somethin' about it, then haven't we accomplished something? So, there's two sides to every 'luss,'" he conceded, then added, "But it is 'luss.'"

Other residents aren't so quick to change, to agree that there is a correct pronunciation. They take pride in the fact they pronounce it differently than is being suggested, and they don't budge. That is, they don't accept what "those in power" say. "Well, we call it löse," the last resident interviewed in the beginning scene said rather decisively.

These residents are primarily working class residents and not involved in promotion of the hills. Their voices, as I've already noted, are not included in the dominant discourse. "When did you first hear the term?" I asked Leo and Rita, retired farmers from Turin. "Was it a term your parents used?"

"Oh no, we didn't know nothin' about the 'lo-ess' hills until about what, 10 years ago? Rita asked Leo. "Oh no, it was a little more than that," Leo answered. But even though

they didn't know the term, "we did know they were blown up here. When I was a boy I knew that."

"But it didn't have a name," Rita persisted.

"They didn't have a name, no." Leo agreed. "We just called 'em 'the hills.'"

"What do you call 'em now?" I asked.

"I call 'em 'the hills.'" Leo repeated, refusing to accept a name other than the one he has identified with. "The 'lo-ess' hills," Rita clarified, willing to accept "lo-ess," a name which she identified with. A class issue occurs in the naming and there implication there is a "correctness" to "facts." It is the educated middle class from Chapter 2 which have given the "correct" name. It is primarily the working class defying these assertions. Both Rita and Leo refuse to accept the scientific facts presented, the claim that there is a correct name.

Political scientist James Scott, in his discussion on "everyday forms of resistance" argues those without power—the subordinated—participate in "everyday forms of resistance" against those individuals dominating. An everyday form of resistance conducted by the working class residents to the middle class is seen in their refusal to change the term they give the landform. For these residents, changing their pronunciation would be changing their vernacular, which is a strong indicator of their culture and their identity.

As the Hospitality Association increasingly enters the dominant discourse, some feel members of the Hospitality Association, primarily middle class individuals, are pushing them, albeit subtly, to use "luss." One of the many days Rosemary and I sat in her farm kitchen drinking coffee we talked about the hills. "We've always just called 'em the hills until these last few years and then we try to call 'em the 'luss,'" she stopped and offered an explanation, "so people understand what we're talkin' about. But we never did call 'em nothing but the hills."

"When did you hear the..." I began.

"Oh, it probably hasn't been over 15 years ago that we heard that word," Rosemary interjected. "Then they started in publicizing it and talkin' about it and all that. In fact, we barely learned how to say it."

"Well, is there a right way to say it?" I asked.

Referring to a Loess Hills afghan she had purchased (introduced in the previous chapter), she remarked upon a flier that is included with each afghan. “There was a story in there and I showed that to Marge and it said ‘l-o-e-s-s.’ Isn’t that how they spell it?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“In parenthesis it says ‘l-u-s-s.’ That’s how to say it. That must’ve meant how they think we oughta say it. We called it ‘lo-ess’ hills, with the o and the e, see? Then came that ‘l-u-s-s.’ They want us to say ‘luss,’ don’t they? They want us to say ‘luss.’ Do you think that’s right?”

I told Rosemary, half willingly, “I think some people do want it said ‘luss.’”

“I do too,” Rosemary replied, to which I quickly added, “But I’m not sure I agree there’s a certain way to say it.”

“That’s just what I wondered if there really is,” Rosemary added.

Rosemary, Leo and Rita are using “symbolic defiance”—a form of “practical resistance”—in Scott’s words, to resist the class based name of the Loess Hills. Their exercise of symbolic defiance is a reaction to the fact the working class voices are not in the discourse which states “how” to pronounce the term, nor the suggestion that perhaps the hills don’t need a name other than “the hills.”

Others whom I talked with appear to be shy about saying the term, out of concern they were mispronouncing it to me (someone who represents scientists), or deferred to me for the correct pronunciation. Jill from Dunlap is one such individual. “I’ve always been a hillgirl. The ‘lo-ess’,” she stopped, said, “‘luss,’” and then continued on.

As I’ve already noted, the group of individuals most commonly cited by residents as the ones suggesting a “correct” pronunciation are those marketing the hills, namely the Loess Hills Hospitality Association. Members of the Hospitality Association, in turn, cite scientists or experts as suggesting there is a “correct” pronunciation. “The one that we usually go with,” a representative from the Hospitality Association told me, “is in the *Fragile Giants* book by Connie Mutel and it says ‘luss.’ And it’s pronounced ‘l-u-s-s,’ so that’s basically where I get my pronunciation from.”

Curiously, the individuals cited for saying there *is* a correct pronunciation appear to

be the least concerned about that. How to pronounce the term is nowhere to be found in the *Fragile Giants* book and the pronunciation is not a big issue to Connie Mutel. “Oh my, it doesn’t matter one bit,” she said laughing, when I asked. “And people always say, ‘oh, you’re the person who wrote that book. How exactly do you pronounce it?’ And I just wanna say, ‘Oh. I don’t care. Just say it however you wanna say it.’”

Even though Jean Prior writes in her 1991 *Landforms of Iowa* book “‘loess,’ usually pronounced to rhyme with ‘fuss’”¹⁵ she told me, “Every geologist I know in the Midwest pronounces it ‘luss,’ but I can remember when I was at Purdue, hearing different pronunciations even then. If somebody pronounces it a different way, that’s fine with me. Nobody can really say they’re wrong. You can’t fault ‘lo-ess’ or ‘less’ or ‘lurse’ or ‘luss.’ You could see phonetically at least, all those could work.”

Willy, cited frequently by residents for providing the “right” pronunciation, told me very succinctly when I asked about pronunciation, “It’s not important. It’s just really not important. Period. Next question.”

The scientists, the ones cited as “authorities,” don’t care about pronunciation, (save for Norm who is a lifelong resident of the area, and adamant because of the identity issues involved). The scientists maintain a neutral and objective stance in this feature of the discourse.

Pronunciation is not only central to identity, but also becomes important when wanting to commodify the hills—for ease of marketing them. “We have tour operators asking ‘how do you pronounce this word anyway?’ as they’re trying to sell it,” Penny of Western Iowa Tourism told me. “It would be nice to have *an* official pronunciation. We need to decide what it is and then try to be consistent with it. My understanding is its ‘luss.’ I was told by conservation people and people in the Loess Hills Hospitality Association, that Iowa State University told ‘em that’s how you pronounce it,” returning to science to support her claim.

Science has become used by residents and promoters in the discourse as an ideological resource, a symbol of hills identity, in local conflicts over the pronunciation. For some, the pronunciation has become a play thing, something to have fun over. Others take

the pronunciation quite seriously. In all cases, it is something the residents are uncertain about, and trying to get their ideological hands around.

This ambivalence over facts extends to the wind blown theory and the comparison to the landform in China—a fact used for marketing and preservation of the hills. In a recent editorial by Steve Hansen, a State Senator from Sioux City, he argues for “Why action by Iowa Legislature is needed,” on the Loess Hills. “You might be asking,” Hansen writes, “What are the Loess Hills and why should they merit national-park status?” His response begins, “The Loess Hills are a landform of windblown silt deposits that possesses natural features found only in one other place in the world, China.”¹⁶ This comparison has become one of the important “statements”—in Foucault’s words—in various discourses promoting the hills.

Charles from Soldier mentioned the comparison to China when he discussed his first exposure to the term. I asked him when and how he learned about this fact. “Oh, not until very recently. When the Loess Hills Hospitality Association advertised the hills, they used that as sort of a marketing tool.” Which they do. As Tory told me and the other tourists when the motorcoach barreled through the hills, “The only other place that there’s loess soil found at 200 feet depth is in China, along the Yellow River.”

Others have heard the comparison for many years. “We’ve heard that since I was a little child that they were special hills, that they were different than anything anywhere else in the world except in China,” Lee told me. “The old timers would tell ya that. Back at that time they already knew that. Of course,” Lee paused to give his opinion on the change of times. “back then, the kids all listened to the old folks!”

“My father talked about these hills,” Ted reflected. “Somewhere he’d got the byline that only one place in China was there the same kind of wind blown soils. My father had an 8th grade education and hadn’t gone to college [but] somewhere he had read that and he grabbed that fact and would flaunt it and some people kind of laughed at it because it does seem a little absurd the fact that we were that unique. But he sensed that. Or he thought they were.”

Ted’s comments imply that even though “facts” are to be picked up in school through

education, of which his father's was limited, he was still able to "sense" the uniqueness of the hills. The comparison to China though, is one that some residents are skeptical about, such as those who would laugh at Ted's father.

Nor is this a comparison all are certain about, and another fact resident's are trying to get their ideological hands around. "I'd heard about the Loess Hills, the wind blown soil, you know, and the only other place like that's in China, I think, or somethin' like that," Mike had told me, his words sounding somewhat similar to the librarian from Onawa who, on my first day out in the hills stated, "I guess they're the only ones like them besides some in Japan...or somewhere."

Trying to establish how this comparison arose, I asked Jean Prior if anyone has done scientific studies, "comparing the Iowa hills and the hills in China?"

"Not any true comparative study, no," Jean told me. "That's something you always hear, that the only other place in the world where this exists is in China," Jean noted then added, "But it's something that we've tried to down-play here. It certainly is one of the rarer land form types in the world. I think we could say that. And places where loess is accumulated in such great thickness to have actually created a topography of its own and to have that topography be as widespread as it is in Iowa, that's unusual. And it's true, certainly, that China is the other place that has enormous loess deposits by comparison. But the comparison with China and here is valid in some ways and they're not so comparable in other ways."

Again, some residents have looked to science's role in the discourse for identity, to support a claim of "uniqueness," and science backs off, taking an objective stance.

The day I spent at the Geological Survey Bureau in Iowa City, I also talked with Art Bettis, a geologist who grew up in Sioux City, and writes about his growing up and playing in the hills in a chapter in *Land of the Fragile Giants*. Art specializes in studying gullies in the hills—of which there are many.

He added to the discussion on the comparison. "I think there's a thing going on between Iowa and Nebraska over it. I know among the scientific community there is because Iowa always claims that it's the thickest loess deposits in the mid-continent and they're really

not. Nebraska has thicker loess. A lot thicker. But the landscape's really different. They don't have Loess Hills, they have a loess plateau. And they're more attuned to China than we are actually."

"Really?" was my surprised response and question, after all I had heard to the contrary.

"They're a much similar desert kind of situation," Art explained.

And as Willy and I hiked that winter day he told me, "The thing to note is that loess is a wind blown soil and it's the depths here that make it so unique. A lot of people think that the only place they're gonna find loess is over here, or the only place you're gonna find the Loess Hills are here. But there are Loess Hills in Kansas and several other states, but not to the depth that we have here."

"So, is it true," I asked, repeating the well worn statement, "that this is the only geological formation of its type besides along the Yellow River in China?"

"No," Willy said succinctly again but then elaborated. "Anytime you have wind blown soil that deposits in a lump or in a hill, then that can be considered a Loess Hills."

My point is not to accept the scientists' answers as fact. Rather, my point is that even in the scientific world, the world from which (I assume) first came the comparison, there is ambivalence—uncertainty—about the comparison, just as there is about the pronunciation. Yet the comparison is conveyed as a true fact by those in the Hospitality Association and other residents (because some believe it is), and is a fact which has taken hold. Science is thus domesticated. Here, as elsewhere, some residents appeal to science as a disinterested arbiter, even when science is uncomfortable with that role.

And the claim continues, even by those who know it's not entirely valid. Norm admitted he has been "caught" when touting this fact.

"The ink that has been written on the Loess Hills is that it's one of a kind," Norm acknowledged. "It's a national landmark. It's not found anywhere else except China. And some of the things that have been written aren't totally factual. They're a combination of fact and sensation. But the sensation is what catches people's eyes or ears. They've been told there's something special out there and they want to see it."

I asked for an example of what's not totally factual. "Well, depending on the writers, they will talk about the loess soil. 'It's so rare. You will not find this anyplace else except in China,'" Norm quoted them. "That's not true. What makes our loess significant is the fact that it's so deep. We have it in 200-250 foot columns. It's the details that people kind of muddy over," Norm explained. "I even did it," he admitted. "I made a statement about, 'the Loess Hills of western Iowa, they're like no other place in the world' or, 'you just don't find them anyplace else.' And I'd have this hand go up in the bus, and it's a professor from the University of Nebraska, and he says, 'Well, I beg to differ with you, there's Loess Hills in Nebraska.' and when he said it, I knew it because I'd read about 'em, I knew that it was there."

The discourse on the comparison to China is shaped by interest and stakes derived from claiming this uniqueness. Within the discourse statements which are constituting the subject are being made which aren't exactly true, nor exactly false. This is being pushed by the desire to claim the hills as "unique," and as something "we have" and "you don't"—an issue of ownership. The statements are also being propelled forth as truth for promotional purposes.

Norm isn't the only one who appears to "muddy" over the details at times. The *Des Moines Register* has done so as well. In the 1997 editorial that argues for national park status, one of the justifications given is the fact that "There isn't another chain of chalmers like the big hills in western Iowa anywhere else in the world but China."¹⁷ "Wrong," says a 1994 *Register* article (backing up the claim with a scientist, naturally!) "Walter Akin, professor emeritus of geography and geology at Drake University in Des Moines argues that loess accumulates in many other places, including downwind of Nebraska's Sandhills."¹⁸ The comparison to China has become a valuable marketing tool for those promoting the hills, and for those who know the difference, the "facts" are secondary.

In his book, *The Past is a Foreign County*, geographer David Lowenthal discusses how historic "facts" of the past are remade for the present, distorted really, to fit how individuals want to perceive them. This pattern is occurring with scientific facts in the hills as well. Somewhere along the way a correct pronunciation and this comparison to China

were taken and accepted as truth. They are readily accepted I believe, because they are seen as scientific facts and believed to be so because of the “expert” sources, even though these sources I talked with downplay them.

A desire to identify with the hills is driving the “correct” pronunciation and a claim to the uniqueness of the hills. A desire to commodify the hills is doing the same. Scientists are quite ambivalent about these “facts,” while some residents are quite adamant about them. It is the middle class residents’ within the landform who are pushing these notions. The working class residents are resisting these facts, primarily the pronunciation—for to change the name they give the landform would be to change their identity, and doing so because its seen as “correct,” a middle class notion, isn’t a good enough reason. In fact for some, that’s the best reason not to. Let’s now turn to a closer look at this class based resistance.

“Pretty naive people”

Throughout this dissertation, I have presented science as being at the base of the discourse—discourse that has constituted the “Loess Hills.” And it is, even if it has played somewhat of an invisible role. But science and scientists are not *always* seen in positions of power. There is also resistance to scientists and their privileged positions. Foucault argues that “power and knowledge is always contested, there is always on-going resistance to it.”¹⁹ Much of this resistance comes from those of the working class, with less privileged positions.

One night, Jerry, Florence, Betty and I talked in their home, not too far from the Loess Hills Wildlife Area, where the Prairie Seminar is held, the most visible form of scientific activity in the area. Jerry made reference to the seminars. “When they first started there wasn’t very many and now they’re getting to be an awful lot of people coming.”

“Have you ever gone to that?” I asked.

“No. We live here!” Jerry exclaimed, inferring a “what could they teach us about our home?” attitude. “The first year they had it there, we went up there and drove by the parking lot. We saw people put their tent on that steep ground. We thought boy, oh boy, they never been very far!”

“You better zip the tent shut or you’re not gonna be in it in the morning!” Florence advised.

“Well, besides that,” Jerry added, “there was two or three people, that dam was dry, and they put their tent down in that and Willy had to go and say, ‘Fellows, this is a dam bottom. Get out of there.’ To me I think they’re getting a lot smarter. The people that come first were pretty naive people. They were like college professors and stuff like that. Didn’t know anything except what they knew. You know,” he explained to me, “they’re smart but they didn’t know anything.”

To which Betty noted, “You can tell they’re flatlanders, huh?” “Flatlanders” is a term which extends beyond those living in the bottomground in the region. Flatlanders refers to any “outsider,” who may be living in hills elsewhere, but they’re still flatlanders as they aren’t living in *these* hills. This became obvious to me when I asked a friend if I would be “local.” “Oh no,” she replied, “you’re a flatlander!” even though she had no idea if I had grown up in hills or not. (I did grow up in an old farmhouse on a hill.)

And scientists, as “flatlanders,” don’t do well in a world not their own. “Outsiders” that in other arenas are given the status of being intelligent, are none too bright when it comes to the everyday life of the hills. Not only do they attempt to put their tents on the steep ground, they can’t navigate themselves in the hills. Individuals attending the seminar inevitably get lost, stop and ask at the closest farmhouse for directions. So why, when these individuals can’t survive in the residents’ world, would residents accept voices about their world, such as the scientific facts? Some don’t accept the sanctioned voices. The individuals reject science and the power it has in society.

This rejection has already been seen in the sharing and laughing at the Iowa State report on the region, which I introduce in Chapter 3. “They’re not asking the right questions,” Robin told me. This laughing at the ineptness of scientists once outside of their element, their “lab,” is one way of working around the discomfort some individuals have towards others deemed “scientists” or “experts.” This discomfort is caused by perceived uneven levels of intelligence, and the class based power which is given to higher levels.

There’s also an additional group who prefer to leave the pondering of scientific explanations to other forces. When Loretta was describing the hills to me at one point she stopped and exclaimed, “God created this. How did He create this? All flat, flat and then all

of a sudden a big mountain. It is different.” I asked her to explain. “Well in my book, it’s different because God made it that way.” And that was that.

“They say there’s only one other chain of hills like this, and that’s in China. There’s only the two in the world,” my friend Helen, a longtime resident of the area, told me as we stood in her garden outside her home in Moorhead. “But, as far as people touring, they aren’t gonna reach down and see that the soil’s any different. It probably isn’t any different. It’s just that’s how they were formed. It’s hard to believe the wind blew all that dirt, isn’t it?” taking the discourse back to its inception, when scientists themselves were ambivalent about the formation (as I mention in Chapter 2).

“Yeah,” I agreed and then as an afterthought asked, “Do you think it did?”

“Well, they tell me it did. I would rather say that it was made by the glaciers pushin’ the dirt as it went. If you want to believe in the glacier age, then when it went down to the bigger streams, the water, the glaciers pushed the dirt and made the hills would be more,” she stopped with her weeding and explanation and asked, “but how do you know what the Lord made in the beginning?”

“Yeah, that’s true,” I acknowledged.

“Nobody was here, huh?” Helen noted. Correctly, I might add.

What about those who aren’t grappling with such issues, who haven’t been exposed to the role of science in the hills (if this is possible)? These are important questions, but ones I’m unable to answer. By the time I moved to Monona County, resident’s exposure to the term “Loess Hills” was widespread. Even though I tried, I never encountered anyone who wondered what I meant when I said I wanted to talk with them about the hills. The stories in Chapter 3 show that individuals quickly had a response about their thoughts on the hills. (In fact, this immediate understanding was my first clue that the landform was an essential aspect of their lives, for I seldom received the same response when explaining my dissertation research elsewhere.)

I was, however, told secondhand stories about those residents who have not yet heard of the term. When she conducted her research in the area in the 1980’s, Connie Mutel noted, “You’d go and say, “I’m doing work on the Loess Hills and nobody knew what the Loess

Hills were. Nobody! Nobody! Except maybe the county conservation officers, and the people at the Loess Hills Seminar, but that was a small and consistent bunch.”

And a landscape architect hired by Golden Hills RC&D to work on the 7-county scenic byway program, recalled in the early 1990’s; “I remember one volunteer that contacted a farmer who lived right in the deep loess soil and had lived there his entire life. When she got to his house to interview him, he said, ‘I don’t understand why you want to talk to me about this. Why don’t you ask someone who lives there?’”

These comments from the 1980’s and 1990’s are not too surprising, given the timeframe residents gave me for first hearing the term. But other secondhand stories are from today. Kirby, the Loess Hills State Forester, when discussing his preferred pronunciation (he goes with “‘luss’ because it’s easy”) noted that “even people in the local area don’t know where they are. That just still thrills me. I mean, as much advertising and stuff has been said.” I asked him what he meant. Echoing responses he’s heard from local individuals, he said, “I mean, ‘Loess Hills? What’s that?’”

Nan expanded on these thoughts. “It’s interesting even today, a lot of local people, when you say Loess Hills, don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t know how many people I describe this to in a course of a year, and they’ll look at you blankly.”

So perhaps not all residents are being impacted by the discourses which are constituting the Loess Hills. But for those who are, they either grapple with the scientific facts, wanting to use them for identity and monetary purposes, or reject them, for identity reasons as well, but also to make larger statements about science, the class based notion of “correctness,” and the dominant position within society these notions have.

From “hill people” to “Hill People”

Nan’s previous comment regarding local people not knowing the term “Loess Hills” caught me a bit by surprise. Continuing our conversation, I asked, “Now when you say ‘local,’” and Nan, anticipating my question said, “I would say, well, probably the bottomlanders out here. You know, there’s always been a division in this county. The hills and the bottom,” Nan stated. “It’s just amazing that people that live out on the bottom know nothing about the hills and don’t venture into the hills very much.”

She continued on this theme of differing identities. “It’s been fun to hear the people that work over at the Hospitality Center. People from Onawa and Whiting come in and say, ‘Oh, we’ve never been in the hills.’ It’s always been ‘you hill people,’ you know. It’s almost like you’re hillbillies.” And with this reflection Nan elaborates on yet another emerging social consequence from the discourse constituting the Loess Hills. A change in collective identity, from “hill people” to “Hill People,” and an increase in pride attached to this identity has occurred.

When I first met Ginger we stood in the front of the Hospitality Association’s Visitor Center. I told her briefly what I was up to in the area. She told me how “tickled” she was with what was going on with the hills. “You know, we used to kind of be ashamed to say we were from the hills.” Why, I wondered.

She explained, “My dad raised purebred hogs and we’d have big auctions on the farm for these purebred hogs. The trucker would come from over towards Onawa and he would always tell us kids we walk funny because we had walked on the hills so long that one leg was shorter than the other. And so,” she continued, “when we did go someplace, why we, you know, did feel kind of like we were different. And they kind of made fun of people that lived in the hills. We were intimidated by it. And so we’d try to walk, you know, real straight. Or I did anyway cuz that kind of was in the back of my mind. ‘Oh gosh,’ am I walkin’ goofy here?”

Ginger continued. “We were maybe a little bit ashamed of where we were from or felt like we weren’t quite as good as some people that lived in the cities. We were kind of ‘hickish.’ She added, as she threw back her shoulders, “We always kinda used to be ashamed of being from the hills. Now we throw our heads back and say, “yes, we *are* from the hills.”

Ginger’s comments magnify the division in Monona County introduced by Nan and alluded to earlier by Trace in Chapter 2 when he discussed the supervisor “from Onawa, out on the flats” who promised “if a bus ever came into this area, I’d stand on my head bare-assed naked in the middle of Main Street.” This geographical division has language to accompany it—flatlander and hill people—language which clearly describes who is where, as the hill farmers indicated in Chapter 3.

As place becomes part of one's own identity and memory, so too does it illustrate group identity. Simply put by Robert Sack, "Place often defines a group and provides it identity."²⁰ "Bottomlanders," "flatlanders," and "river rats" are the terms defining those living in the Missouri River Valley. "Hill people," "hillbillies," and "hicks" are the three reserved for those living in the hills. The terms are loaded with meaning and identity, a way of saying who those in the hills are, and who they are not (this works as well for those in the bottom). The terms imply geographical differences. But the terms also suggest a split along rural-urban lines, differing types of agriculture, (both of which have already been shown) and differing views of "proper" behavior, based on religious and ethnic differences, brought forth in Grant's explanation.

"You see, you've got old deep feelings going here. They always looked at us, 'they,'" Grant clarified. "meaning Onawa, as a bunch of hicks. And we always looked at them and they'd stay up all night at the country club drinking and playing cards and losing thousands of dollars. Both sides just looked at the other side and sneered." I have been told that in early days drinking of alcohol and dancing was frowned upon, especially around Moorhead. This disdain for alcohol and dancing is attributed to the "Holy Danes" (who split from the "Happy Danes" who played cards) and a large Mormon settlement near Moorhead.

Geographer Pierce Lewis states "all landscape has cultural meaning, no matter how ordinary that landscape may be."²¹ That is, if one part of the country looks substantially different from another part of the country, then chances are very good that the cultural meaning, the identity of the two places are different also. Differing collective identities of those individuals residing in the hills and the bottomground exists, identities that are based at least partially upon the physical landscape.

These identities are socially constructed and have been accepted to varying degrees, by those in and outside of the landform. At the core of the geographically based division is the issue of class, which underlies the language used to describe who is who. "Hicks," "hillbillies," and "hill people," were working class individuals, who were made fun of. But with the attention the hills are receiving as a result of the discourses, the working class have turned the hierarchy upside down, and are now in an enviable position.

“I think it’s [the attention] great,” Ellie told me, “because when I was in high school it was ‘you’re from the sticks,’ you know. ‘Hicks from the sticks,’” she repeated. “They didn’t realize at that time that we did have a beautiful country here. They just thought we was out in the sticks.”

“Now who would make those comments?” I asked.

“When we’d go to play basketball or any kind of sports in high school, the kids from Onawa used to say, ‘oh, the hicks from the sticks.’” Then Ellie gave her explanation for this. “See, I think it was a poor community before my time. The poor souls are gone now, but when I was fixin’ hair I would talk to some of them and they were poor people. Real poor people. They used to make their own soap because they couldn’t afford it. What they lived on was the cream they’d bring to town on Saturday and Wednesday nights. Sell their cream and their eggs.”

When Ted told me “We were hillbillies,” I asked him what that meant.

“Well, we’re people of the hills. We weren’t rich. We were usually poor.”

Poverty, as the hills residents suggest, was one indicator of who lived in the hills. A clear distinction between who was in the town and who was in the country was another. Grant’s comments indicate that those in the hills had strong feelings towards those in the city, who drank, played cards, and were not frugal. When Ginger suggested she didn’t feel “quite as good” as those in the city, she also noted when they did travel, “we could go to the city and get around and knew how to function. But the city people could not come to the country at all. So then you start thinking who is having a problem here...” implying while the rural residents could adapt in the city, vice versa didn’t work so well. People who live in the bottom “know nothing about the hills and don’t venture into them very much,” noted Nan. But the same isn’t said for those who live in the hills. It’s implied that those in the hills can function in the city, and do. The town mouse, however, has a tough time in the country.²²

In his book *Hillbillyland*, an examination of how movies depict “hillbillies,” J.W. Williamson defines the “hillbilly” as someone who “lives not only in hills but on the rough edge of the economy.”²³ Included in the descriptions of how hillbillies are portrayed in movies include “rural, poor but fruitful, and blatantly anti-urban.”²⁴ All characteristics which

Ellie, Ginger, Ted, Nan, and Grant have suggested.

While the division and deep feelings may have died down over time, it is still a stigma that sticks, both by outsiders and locals. A State employee in the area, explaining some of the options farmers had for their land mentioned they didn't feel many would try the options. "It requires a little bit of what's probably perceived as non-traditional management. I don't know whether you've noticed but some of these people out here are pretty backward."

"If we go over to Onawa and we tell people we're from Castana, 'Oh, you're from over in the sticks.' We hear that." Mike explained to me one day. "And we call those people the flatlanders. They can't understand how we can drive around on the side with a farm tractor and make a livin', and I can't understand how they can make a livin' where it's drowned out half the time, because it's too wet."

When I called the *Onawa Democrat* to begin my subscription to the paper, I gave my address. "22355 Orange Avenue."

"Orange Avenue," the man on the other end said. "That's impressive."

Then I gave my town. "Castana."

"So much for the impressive," I was told.

So the hierarchy isn't turned completely upside down. Hill people are still seen as "backward" by various individuals not in the landform.

On Superbowl Sunday 1998, I sat in the Castana Tap watching the Denver Broncos beat the Green Bay Packers. The doors to the Tap flew open. In walked two men. "Better be careful about what you're saying," they announced as they strolled in. "The flatlanders are here," showing up front they are aware of the division, a division that has resulted in both sides making less than pleasant remarks about the others. Despite the public acknowledgement of the animosity, the flatlanders were still welcome. For a beer at least.

"Hillbillies" was (and is) not a term which was always used visibly. "We that were raised in the hills were hillbillies, I guess," Naomi told me when describing the hill farm where she grew up. "Did people call you hillbillies?" I wondered. "I don't know. They didn't to our faces!" she exclaimed.

Nor is "hillbillies" and the value laden stigma it implies something that everyone

shares or wants to discuss. One of my first days in the hills, I talked with a friend from Soldier. He was discussing what living in the region was like. “We were hillb.....” he stopped, and said instead, “poor.” One June night, a friend from Turin and I went to Navaretti’s Restaurant, in Whiting. It is owned by a Hispanic family from Sioux City and known for its great Mexican food. After dinner we walked on main street. It was early in my research, and I was trying to figure out what where residents placed the boundaries of the hills. “Is Whiting in the hills?” I asked my friend, as I attempted to see what towns identified with the landform. Perhaps my silly question put him off, for Whiting is clearly physically not *in* the hills. “Its Monona County,” was his reply. “Okay,” I said, “but is it in the hills or not?” “Its Monona County,” he replied again. I tried once more but this time asked, “Is all of Monona County considered in the hills?”

“Peggy,” began his reply, “you, out of all people should know you don’t class people. You don’t class them into hillbillies and river rats.” I was surprised that I was seen as classifying people, as I had never used the terms “hillbillies” or “river rats” in his presence. I let it go, for I was frustrating him. A while later he said, “Let’s go for a ride in the hills.” “There,” I noted (somewhat defiantly) “you said it too. All I’m trying to say is, is there is a distinction between where the hills are, and where the hills are not.” “Yes, but we all intermingle,” he wanted me to know. I hadn’t suggested they didn’t.

The labeling appears to be something men are less willing to talk about than women, in part I believe because the stereotype hits much closer to home for them. This part of “rural America” is still very gendered, where the men are primarily responsible for the farming operation and the women “help out” most often by plowing in the late fall or early spring, and have other activities such as preparing church suppers and volunteering. The rural ideology residents hold includes viewing men as farmers and women playing the supporting role, turning them into “invisible farmers.”²⁵ The hillbilly stereotyping extends to the identity of men’s self, as a farmer and therefore by extension the type of farmer they are. “Hill farmer” meant smaller farms and less workable land. It also meant “poor farmer” as Ron indicated. “Poor farmer” both literally and figuratively.

Some residents have fun with this “labeling,” annually holding a “Hillbilly Picnic”

(drawing around 100 neighbors) and readily calling themselves and others “hillbillies.” The hierarchy of class in the county is clearly encoded in the terms “hillbillies” and “hicks.” By the working class individuals taking on the language used for power, they turn the hierarchy on its head. They also state, in so many words, it’s not just the dominant group which gets to “define us,” they get to “define ourselves.”

Some residents are also no longer “ashamed” of this collective identity because it is changing—from “hill people” to “Hill People.” This change is due to the positive attention the landform (which provided the labels to begin with) is getting from outside the area.²⁶ The power/knowledge discourse constituting the Loess Hills has turned the hierarchy of class upside down in the region, an additional positive aspect (I believe) of the power generated from the dominant discourse. Individuals now identify with the hills and are proud to say, as Ginger noted, “yes, we *ARE* from the hills.” The “hicks,” as Ellie put it, are getting attention, and being cast in an enviable light.

“It used to be you’d hear somethin’ about Onawa,” Mike told me one day when he stopped to deliver a package, stayed for a cup of coffee, and reflected upon how things were changing in the area. “But now this Loess Hills, this is the Castana/Turin area. When that conversation comes about or there’s an article or somethin’ about the Loess Hills area, people now tend to say, ‘Hey, we’re from that area.’ We live in the midst of that,” he said, proudly.

Western Iowa meets Iowa

A change in collective identity from “hill people” to “Hill People” is occurring within the region. An identity is also being created *beyond* the region. Due to the constituting of the Loess Hills, Western Iowa is now being introduced to the rest of the state to which it is joined.

During one of the several times I popped in to say “hi” to Liz in the Moorhead Post Office, I met Stella, a teacher from Soldier. In her efforts to place me, she asked where I was from. “Cedar Rapids.” I replied. “Ohhhhh,” she responded. “Yes, an Eastern Iowan,” I bravely told her, having heard enough comments by then to know my status as such had a stigma attached to it.

On another occasion, while touring the Monona County Historical Museum, I began

to talk with Blinky and Maggie who were volunteering that Saturday. I told them what I was up to, and where I was from. We talked briefly on what they thought about the hills. After my questioning them, Maggie turned to questioning me. "Now why are *you* interested in the Loess Hills?" she inquired. "You're from Eastern Iowa." She was only one of several to ask.

I initially found it odd that so many were curious why I, an Eastern Iowan, was interested in their part of the state. Why wouldn't I be? It was Iowa, after all. But as time went on, I realized that many of those living in Western Iowa have felt left out by the rest of Iowa, and resent it. Because of its low population,²⁷ little attention and very few state resources seem to flow in that direction. Attention from Iowans in general to the western part of the state is deemed lacking, leaving Western Iowans feeling neglected and ignored.

The disregarding of Western Iowa is hinted at in some of the previous pages. Marilyn referred to this lack of recognition when she noted, "I really think that a lot of Iowa, anything east of Boone, never paid attention to Western Iowa." Tom Moore noted his own reaction, when Dean Roosa suggested he do a program on the Loess Hills, was "I had no idea what he was talking about and I've lived in Iowa all my life." And as soon as "Land Between Two Rivers" was aired, Tom noted, "I started getting calls from people saying, "Where is this loess hill? Where is that?" Adults would call back and say 'We didn't even think we were in Iowa. It was just unlike anything we'd ever seen before.'" The rest of Iowa was surprised when they were eventually introduced to their western part.

Gigi described what it was like for her when she first drove from Central Iowa to Western Iowa in the 70s. "I drove from where I lived to here and I'm goin', 'what are these mammoth things? 'We're in Iowa and look at these things.'"

I, too, had little awareness of Western Iowa. After riding through on I-80 in 1973, I did not go back to the area until 1995. When my family and friends in Central and Eastern Iowa asked what I was doing and where, the common response was, "I've never heard of them. Where are they?" Showing pictures to them, they would question me. "This is Iowa?" I find this is still a common response, even with increased discourses on the landform.

The "State" is perceived by many residents as being the main culprit in this

inattentiveness. The Iowa Department of Tourism is recognized for failing to appreciate Western Iowa and the Loess Hills until recently. When Trace pursued support from the Department of Tourism, he was told, “That’s not where the state of Iowa’s going.” The accompanying video for the “Land of the Fragile Giants” art exhibit is titled “A Place Apart”—a title also suggesting distance. Marilyn, when gathering support for the exhibit was turned down by the Department. “They realized what a mistake that was,” she told me, once the show began, and popularity for it soared.

Political attention by the Iowa Legislature to the area is also perceived as lacking. “My favorite term, and in today’s world it’s probably not a good term,” Mike told me, somewhat apologetically. “We’re in Indian territory. As far as the state legislators go, as soon as you get west of Carroll, Iowa, they lose interest real fast because our population drops real fast. We don’t have enough people over here, we’re lower income based, we’re not paying as much taxes. The interest is gonna go where the bulk of the population does. And so our state legislators out here,” Mike continued, “they do the best they can as few as they are. They knuckle under pressure! That’s politics! I think we’re definitely behind the mainstream for that reason. When you go over in eastern Iowa, you don’t find many rural gravel roads. We’ve got ‘em in town!” referring to the gravel and dirt roads of Castana once again.

Population and therefore lack of political power are reasons given for the sense of separation Western Iowa has from the rest of Iowa. Other factors figure into the equation as well. “When I was growing up in Sioux City,” Art Bettis told me, “I felt like I knew more about what was going on in Nebraska and Omaha and Sioux Falls than I did in Des Moines or Cedar Rapids. The economy is really like that. Until fairly recently, it was a big cattle area so the economy was more suited to what was across the river. It’s just an accident of geography that we ended up having to be in Iowa because otherwise, economically, it’s more part of Nebraska and South Dakota. Climatically, too.”

Tom echoed these thoughts in his perceptions of the division. “Western Iowa has felt alienated from the state from the beginning. Northwest Iowa feels more comfortable with South Dakota than they do Iowa. And, you know, the *Register* doesn’t get out there. And

that's not just because the *Register* doesn't wanna go out there, it's because they [the residents] see themselves differently. I mean, the *Omaha World Herald* is the paper out there, not the *Register*."

These comments are similar to those made by writer Kathleen Norris in her 1993 book *Dakota*. Living in Western South Dakota, Norris, commenting on the many differences that separate the Western from the Eastern Dakotas, noted; "Eastern North and South Dakota have enough rainfall and population density to hang on at the western fringes of the Midwest, having more in common with Minnesota and Iowa,"²⁸ suggesting (implicitly), like Art and Tom, the artificial boundaries created when the nation was in its formation.

Periodic attempts have been made to rectify the division between Western Iowa and the rest of the State. Larry Stone's reasons for why he first ventured out in the hills, as a *Des Moines Register* reporter, were primarily due to the fact that "the *Register* editors in the early 70s were saying 'now we're neglecting these people in western Iowa. We really need to do more out there.'" Larry Wilson noted at the dedication for the Loess Hills Overlook, "I sat down with the commissioners and said that we need to take a real aggressive approach down in Western Iowa," after seeing that there wasn't much in terms of State land.²⁹

But the best rectification of the division was not a planned attempt to do so. Rather, it is a result of a conglomeration of actors and activities involved in the dominant discourse, and spin-offs from this and the underlying discourses.

As Norm and I sat at the Harrison County Conservation Headquarters, he told me he feels, "Iowa has grabbed the Loess Hills. Iowa has made it their crown jewel on the western side of the state." I was curious how much Iowa had "grabbed it."

"Well, that's maybe a strong statement," Norm acknowledged. "I guess Western Iowa has grabbed it. But to explain his earlier statement, he noted, "The Iowa Division of Tourism publicizes the Loess Hills in all of their publications. I don't know that they've embraced it to the point that they should. But they certainly have given it more recognition than Western Iowa's ever gotten in the past. And we've gotten nothing in the past."

Norm then elaborated on what he felt awareness to the area has done. "I think maybe that has provided a little bit of pride to the people here in the respect that they have now

gained a little bit of recognition. That the *Des Moines Register* runs these full page dissertations about the significance of the hills. I think people have a feeling that we're being recognized a little bit more." Constituting of the Loess Hills has resulted in giving an identity to Western Iowa, and therefore an identity to Western Iowans.

As several residents have said, some literally, and others in similar words, the "discovery" of the landform "has put them on the map," and given them something to be proud of. "I like the idea of the tour bus driving by our house. I like the idea of the Loess Hills being noticed," Luann told me. "I thought it gave us a little dignity," as if to say "We Western Iowans are worthy people too."

The pride and worthiness also extends to younger adults. After airing "Land Between Two Rivers," Tom Moore told me, "I got quite a few letters from kids that said they felt more proud about their area now that it was someplace special. It just wasn't western Iowa but that if they said they lived in the Loess Hills, people knew and said, 'Wow, you're lucky. You live in the loess.' As opposed to, 'oh yeah, those hill people out there. Just barely get by and drive jalopies.'"

Tom's comments sum up well the identity issues related to the hills. The identity of hickishness/backwardness has changed for hill residents. The constitution of the Loess Hills has now given residents within the landform an envied identity. "Wow, you're lucky, you live in the loess," Tom reports hearing. This change in identity has produced feelings of pride and worthiness to many who live there.

When "everyone" as Fred said in Chapter 3, told him the view at the overlook was a "fucking great view," it was not just because of the view. In fact, I suggest that is a secondary reason for why some residents admire the overlook. The primary reason is the Loess Hills Scenic Overlook in the State Forest is a representation—one of the most visible signs yet that the State of Iowa (more precisely individuals outside of Western Iowa) has perhaps (finally) noticed Western Iowa. "It's nice to see the State do something for Western Iowa for once," my friend John told me while we looked over the view.

"Have you been to the lookout [Overlook]?" Arlene, from Soldier asked, and then answered for me, "I'm sure you have. I can truly say," she paused for emphasis, "it's the first

time the State did something good for us out here.”

The initial statement of the dominant discourse, “these are Loess Hills” has resulted in multiple social consequences. A community has changed, physically and socially, as it takes on the Loess Hills identity. There is a sense of proprietorship over the landform and the view it offers, but also a desire to share it, but only to a certain degree. This is causing tension for residents. For many of the same reasons they gave for why they loved the area in chapter 3, residents are concerned about what will happen to the area, fears which focus on loss of lifestyles, loss of farmers who can’t compete, and loss of a “right” atmosphere in the rural area.

Residents of the hills are proud of the identity that has been given to the landform, for it has altered the hierarchy in the county and turned the class issue upside down. Residents are also proud of the attention because it has given those in Western Iowa *an* identity, particularly within the state of Iowa, similar to a sibling who is finally getting more equal (although many would argue not yet) attention within the family.

FIVE**POWER AND DEMOCRACY IN A “NEW” LANDFORM**

I met up with Carmen at the Prairie Seminar in 1997. I had remembered her from an earlier encounter at the Hospitality Association in Moorhead. I re-introduced myself, and told her I was going to be living in the area for several months. She was excited when I said I wanted to look at the meaning people give to the hills, responding, “That is so important.” She stressed how I needed to talk with people in Onawa. “They will,” Carmen said, “identify with parts of the hills. For example, the little white church [Danish Ingemann Church], they’ll sell postcards of the church. But they won’t sell postcards of the hills.”

I noted this as well on my first day out to the area (which I describe in Chapter 1). I found the dearth of hill postcards in Onawa curious, with the only one being sold that of the Danish Ingemann Church with its caption, “Fall in the Loess Hills, Near Onawa.” I began to realize there are lines drawn as to what communities will identify with the landform.

Some of my curiosity regarding the postcard was also settled one afternoon Freda and I spent together at the Hospitality Association. It was one of my first days of volunteering, so she was there to help me out. We scratched off “Made in China” from mugs with “Loess Hills” graphics and words on them. Trace came in during the afternoon, and sat down to hang out and talk. Freda told him, “You’re to be commended for all you did Trace. We wouldn’t have this if it weren’t for you. Why did you leave?” Trace gave his explanation for why he is no longer involved with the Hospitality Association. I also began to realize there are attempts to allow specific voices, and not allow other voices, into the discourse.

Freda and Trace talked a bit more, and then Freda asked Trace, “You know what gets to me Trace? There’s the postcard of the Danish Church...and it says its near Onawa. Well, it’s just down the road from Moorhead....Why does it say Onawa?”

“That was all politics,” Trace replied. “We didn’t have anyone to pay for the printing of the postcards. Someone in Onawa said they would pay for it, if we put Onawa on the postcard. So we had to do that.”

“Okay,” Freda said resignedly, “but its nowhere near Onawa,” she repeated.

And I came to realize the politics involved in the discourses on the “Loess Hills”—politics that includes acts of power and democracy in the landform.

As interest in the Loess Hills grows, so grow the number of individuals and relationships involved in the discourses, increasing the number of power situations. In this chapter I take a closer look at a major social consequence of this discourse, particularly as it has occurred within the region. Now that the subject, “the Loess Hills,” has been constituted, issues of proprietorship have intensified over the Loess Hills.

These issues include ownership over the Scenic Byway idea and the “right” to speak for the hills. Imagined Loess Hills communities have also been created, with physical and social boundaries drawn. These boundaries include certain voices, and exclude other voices. Some of this exclusion is intentional. Those who have a larger role, and more power in the discourse also misrepresent residents’ voices. Democracy is not practiced to its fullest. The exercise of power by groups and individuals, an exercise that is accompanied by different visions of democracy, is what I examine in the following pages.

Whose Scenic Byway?

As Desiree held the tattered map, full of different colored lines to indicate “hiking,” “biking,” and “good views,” in her hands, she told me the story of how she started drawing maps for guests. “I would tell ‘em different places to stop. There’s a little tiny place in Magnolia called Millie’s. And it’s a little bar and there’s a little restaurant and 1930s-type furnishings in the front. And one pool table and five bar stools in the back. And she’s got a jukebox with,” she caught herself, “well, you’re too young but ‘Pearly Shells’ was one of the songs years and years ago. Well, Millie still has it on her jukebox. So I’d say, ‘If you like pork tenderloins, stop at Millie’s and have a pork tenderloin.’”

She continued with her travelogue. “And then I’d tell people to stop at the cemetery up there and see all of these different kinds of evergreen trees. And stop at this place for the view, you know. And then they would get back here and they’d say, ‘Can we keep this map? We wanna come back again.’” Desiree, as she noted in Chapter 2, got tired of going to the County Office to get more maps and draw in more lines, and was looking for a way to make

printed maps with her scenic ideas. I could see why. I too, took the tour, stopped and chatted with Millie while having a tenderloin and a beer, went to the cemetery with petrified wood tombstones, then the one with the view, and asked to keep the map when I returned to Desiree's.

But while it is commonly stated and while I did the same in Chapter 2, that Desiree had the original idea for the Loess Hills Scenic Byway and wrote the grant for it, Trace, on several occasions, has corrected others (as well as myself) when they attribute the idea to Desiree. "Actually, she say's it's her idea, but it was my idea," he told me, "Because I'd traveled and I'd looked at the great river road along the Mississippi, I had this idea of this scenic byway thing." And so from the very beginning, ownership over the idea of the Scenic Byway became important in the discourse, important enough that individuals and groups wanted to both clarify and claim ownership.

The most common story told about the Scenic Byway is similar to Penny's recollection. She blends both Trace's and Desiree's ideas, noting "Desiree would sit down and draw a map, 'if you go down this road, it's very scenic and if you go here you'll see another orchard.' And she was saying, 'wouldn't it be neat if we could find a way to produce a map and some information for people so I didn't have to set down and draw this all the time.' And then talking about broadening that to bring people actually into the area was Trace's initial interest too so we kind of blended the two."

But then Penny told me abruptly, "The [Golden Hills] RC&D did the Scenic Byway, *not* the Loess Hills Hospitality Association. Loess Hills Hospitality Association had very little, if anything to do with the Scenic Byway." By this time (several months into my research) I had heard some comments regarding this dispute, so I wasn't totally surprised by Penny's comments. Yet hearing this said so adamantly told me the issue is still a sore spot, for I hadn't suggested who did, or did not do the Scenic Byway. As it was important for Trace to clarify his claim, so too was it important for Penny to stake ownership for Golden Hills RC&D.

I wanted to clarify what Penny was getting at. "The Scenic Byway first started in Monona and Harrison, is that right? And then it was expanded?"

“Well, yeah. Kind of, yeah,” Penny said. “Those were the counties that they started the signage. And [Golden Hills] RC&D took that and did a whole seven county Scenic Byway.”

All involved seem to be in agreement on this progression of events. That is, a group of residents, instigated by Trace and Desiree, began the Scenic Byway in Monona and Harrison counties. Trace drew a “squiggly sign” on a napkin at the initial meeting, and the Byway logo was created. The Golden Hills RC&D became involved and expanded it to all counties which the landform runs through. But *who* had the idea and initiated the Byway is still a tender topic particularly for Trace and some members of the Hospitality Association—a tender topic because an identity of being the ones credited for “discovering” the hills was taken away. And because a bureaucracy was perceived as using its power position and taking over the grass-roots efforts those involved in were so proud of.

“We weren’t educated people,” Naomi told me when discussing beginning tourism efforts. “We were just the local people that took over. There was no promotion from high up if I wanted to say it that way. It was all done locally, which is good.”

“Why is that good?” I wondered.

“Its grassroots and you have the pride of it when its done,” reasoned Naomi. “But if you’d hired somebody to come in and do it, why there wouldn’t have been that same pride.”

There was pride by those in the Hospitality Association in these initial efforts because they saw themselves not as “educated people” but “just the local people,” who were doing quite alright on their own with promotion of the hills. They saw themselves doing something they usually only attributed to those with more sanctioned voices, the “educated.” And those in the Hospitality Association were proud of this (and should be).

“I really want to tell you the rest of the story,” Trace told me one day over the phone, referring to the story of how tourism got going. “Agencies came in and took over, they were top down and said they ‘know better than we do.’ [Golden Hills] RC&D are the main culprits, with their self importance and winning a national award and taking credit for it.”

So when the “educated people” entered the scene at the local level, residents were insulted. This “knowing better than you do” theme was felt by several residents involved at

the beginning of the tourism efforts. "There was always this power struggle," a longtime active representative of the Hospitality Association told me, "between Loess Hills Hospitality and Golden Hills. I don't think they wanted to give us the satisfaction that we were doing things right."

Desiree also felt they were being told by Golden Hills RC&D that what they were doing wasn't "good enough." "What's happened since then," Desiree told me as she continued her story of the Scenic Byway, "Somebody else picks it up and says, 'Well, now that's not good enough.' In fact, it was Golden Hills. They got somebody to come in on some kind of a temporary basis and do not only Monona and Harrison, but do all of it."

In a case study of the Loess Hills Scenic Byway published by Golden Hills RC&D, the history of the Byway is presented, as is the involvement of the RC&D in the discourse. "In 1990 the RC&D Coordinator provided assistance to residents in Monona and Harrison Counties in forming the Loess Hills Hospitality Association. In effect, this request became the original effort at establishing the Loess Hills Scenic Byway."¹ Credit for the Scenic Byway idea is given to the Hospitality Association.

But a sense of "you're not doing it right" is also given. In a section of the case study titled, *The First Completed Segment Without Professional Direction: 1989-1990*, Monona and Harrison Counties are discussed specifically. "In this segment, a small project committee was formed. This committee selected the scenic routes, coordinated sign design and locations, and produced a small brochure showing the routes. Little attention was paid to the way that the routes flowed between each other, the variety of scenery presented on the routes, types of road surfaces and the availability of visitor services."² The title, part of which states, "without professional direction" implies the power/knowledge by the agency in the discourse on the Scenic Byway. Problems were also found in the locally designed brochure and "led to some confusion for users...the map was difficult to follow when attempting to travel between the segments. Also, users of the brochure found its hand-written graphics difficult to interpret."³ Because the Golden Hills had educated bureaucrats, they had the knowledge to "do things better."

A second major source of tension over ownership issues arose when the Byway was

given a major award from Scenic America in October 1992, naming it one of the “Ten Most Outstanding Scenic Byways.” In acknowledgments for this award, the Hospitality Association is absent, an omission whose effects are also felt to this day. This omission may be due because some believe, as Penny does, that the Hospitality Association “had very little if anything” to do with the Scenic Byway.

But others have a different view. “RC&D kind of,” Desiree paused and said, “well, they kind of took credit for it,” referring to the idea of the Scenic Byway. A representative from the Hospitality Association felt, “I think there’s a difference of opinion that probably Golden Hills RC&D and some other organizations think or feel that they were the ones that did it, and really it was just all of us working together. I guess I’m proud of the fact that the Loess Hills Scenic Byways started in Monona and Harrison County and we were the first byway in Iowa plus we were the first two counties.”

Residents clearly feel they have been subjected to power by a bureaucracy, in this case the Golden Hills RC&D, and feel their voices were shoved out of the discourse on the Scenic Byway. Yet, Golden Hills also broadened this specific discourse, and attempted to increase democracy (while at the same time being accused of limiting it) when expanding the Scenic Byway to all seven counties the landform is in.

The Hospitality Association continues to print and distribute an updated version of the original two-county (Harrison and Monona) Scenic Byway. A recent request has been made by the Hospitality Association Board that the two-county map be posted at the Loess Hills Scenic Overlook. Both these actions are attempts by the Hospitality Association to reject the power they feel they are being subjected to. They are also both attempts to exercise power, for by using the maps with two counties, they are limiting the boundaries of the discourse. The Hospitality Association accepts the domination by Golden Hills in part because, at another level, they exercise domination. As individuals are subjected to power, argues Foucault, so too do they exercise it. In Scott’s words, “The expectation that one will eventually be able to exercise the domination that one endures today is a strong incentive to legitimate patterns of domination.”⁴

An additional attempt to exercise power by the Hospitality Association is over

ownership of the trademarked logo, the one Trace drew on a napkin the first meeting held in 1989. “The Loess Hills Scenic Byways signs on the roads and highways are a registered trade mark of L.H.H.A!” states their literature, and directly underneath, “Shop at the L.H.H.A Visitor Center-Gift Shop for “Byways” logo items.” That is, if you want the “true” thing, come to the Hospitality Association.

Desiree, Trace, and the Golden Hills RC&D are the names I heard most frequently when discussing formation of *The Loess Hills Scenic Byway*. But many others also have produced “Loess Hills” scenic byways. For instance, in Connie Mutel’s 1989 *Fragile Giants*, a section of the book is devoted to “Touring the Loess Hills,” with detailed tours in the northern, central and southern section of hills, the southern section extending in to Missouri and Southeastern Nebraska.⁵

Tom Moore of Iowa Public Television also has his own “Scenic Byways.” After airing the 1987 “Land Between Two Rivers,” Tom noted, “Adults would call and ask ‘Where’s that Loess Hill at’ or ‘Exactly where is it? What town is it near?’ I gave them specific locations,” Tom said. “You know, ‘go to this county road, and there’s a great view there! Drive this road, but only if it hasn’t rained for 3 weeks!’”

So at least two other “Scenic Byways” were being suggested several years before the “official Scenic Byway” was completed in 1991. Hill residents have had “Scenic Byways” much longer than this.

Ellie used to run the Moorhead Bed and Breakfast. As we sat in her kitchen, she told me “one night I had a gal come in from Florida. The next morning she says to me, ‘Ellie, I love it here. Can you tell me where I could go and not get lost and drive around?’ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘I’ve got a couple hours. I’ll take ya in my car.’ And so we just drove all over. We went out to the State Park and we went down Sophie’s Hollow, and where the old church used to be, south of town down where Savory’s Pond is. I think we was gone 2 ½ hours. Oh, she really enjoyed it.” This is Ellie’s Scenic Byway.

When I would ask residents, “what are your favorite spots,” many would simply reply, “I just like to drive through the hills and see the different areas.” Driving in and around the hills is a common recreational activity for many residents and non-residents, all of whom

have their own Scenic Byway. And so the point of ownership over the idea of a Scenic Byway appears to be a silly issue to be arguing over. However, the length of time the issue has lingered indicates the importance given to ownership of ideas, and is an early signal of the ownership over the landform.

Robert Sack's notion of territoriality describes well what is occurring in the region. Territoriality, Sack writes, "is the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area."⁶ The Scenic Byway is only one example of territoriality.

"It's a free county, I guess."

During my time in the hills, the influx of buses coming from Sioux City, Nebraska and elsewhere which did not arrange a tour through the Hospitality Association grew. This caused great concern to those in the Hospitality Association for the motorcoach tours are "our bread and butter." And the "bread and butter" is not spreading as it is hoped. The Hospitality Association is struggling financially and would not be able to operate without its volunteer labor, primarily that of women.

One day while I was volunteering at the Hospitality Association, a bus pulled into Moorhead. But none of us there were prepared for it. It wasn't a Hospitality Association sponsored tour. A brief exchange occurred between two Hospitality Association members. "I don't know whose buses these are or where they're coming from," noted one. "They must be our competition." "I'd like to find out where and who is running the tours," noted the other. Then they both concluded, "Well, it's a free country, I guess," a sentiment expressed several times—and one which cuts right to the core of the residents' patriotic beliefs of democracy and freedom. This sentiment however, also causes tension. Some of those within the Hospitality Association see other organizations capitalizing on something they feel they have "worked hard for" and "do a better job with," implying only their voices should be included in this specific discourse.

One argument for why the Hospitality Association should have the "right" to promote over others is they began the tourism efforts in the first place. "We were the first ones that had the buses come through here, Monona County was," Blinky, who was involved with the

Hospitality Association when it first began, told me. “But then Harrison County got in on the bandwagon and a lot of times it’s Pottawattamie that has a big write-up about the Loess Hills. I said, ‘Sure, we started it and they get all the credit.’ I’m bein’ a little bit nasty about it but....” indicating she knows she “shouldn’t” feel this way, yet still does.

A second argument for the rights to promotion is that the other tour companies “don’t do the tours as well as we do,” and it’s only the Hospitality Association tours which tell the “correct” facts. An item listed under “Important Loess Hills Facts and Information” in the Hospitality Association literature discusses the “Step-on Guides.” These are the tour guides who took the original training, and literally step on the bus at a specific point, and then spend the day with the bus, such as Tory did.

“‘Step-on’ guides tell all about it!” declares the Hospitality Association’s calendar, with directly underneath “Our ‘Step On’ guides are the best because they live here!” That is, ownership over promotion of the hills becomes the “right” of those who live in the hills and tell the “true” stories of the area.

“Not all people on some of these tours coming through are telling the truth,” Lyle told me one day as we sat in the Hospitality Association office. “Liola has heard them when they’ve just told something which isn’t true at all...” Liola laughed and took over telling the story. “It was kind of interesting, a tour bus [not a Hospitality Association bus] arranged to have their snack here at the cafe, so I went up there when they pulled in. I was going to greet them, and so I stood there listening to the tour guide, and she said ‘now when we leave here, we’ll be going through the next town where Jesse James robbed a bank.’ Meaning Pisgah.” Liola laughed again and then asked incredulously, “Where do they get that? Yes, they say that Jesse James went through this area and was overnight in maybe the old hotel up in Ute, but not any bank was robbed in this area by Jesse James that I know of.”

Yet, other longtime residents of the hills are disturbed with what they perceive as the Hospitality Association’s misrepresentation of facts. The Heritage/Ethnic Tour is one of the popular motorcoach tours offered by the Hospitality Association. It, like all the tours, goes by the Danish Ingemann Church. “The stories of the early immigrants trials and tragedies will touch your heart,” promises a sample tour from the Hospitality Association.

“We’ll soon be to the Little Ingemann Danish church,” Tory told us as the motorcoach rolled through the hills. “And there’s quite a story to tell about it. They laid the cornerstone in 1884. Peter and Mary Johnson had come over from Denmark. And they’d had nine children. But little Maggie was accidentally scalded, so they lost one child. Well, they lived over in a hollow on beyond and in 13 days they lost seven of their children to diphtheria.” Tory continued the admittedly sad story. “And as each child would die, they had a prearranged signal, and Peter would ride his white horse up on a ridge. The men over the side that were working on a barn would stop and build a coffin. And often times they would bring it to the house, pass it through the window, they’d put the body in, and take it back out for burial as they passed each one out the windows. People didn’t dare go in. As each one passed out the window, she would sing a little Danish prayer song. But with the last one, she couldn’t do it.”

On some tours, the passing of the casket out the window is given as a cultural fact. Glenda, a Hospitality Association tour guide and former Board member who grew up in Moorhead told me, “You know, stories get embellished, and somehow people think it’s a Danish custom to put the casket through the window. Well, they did that because the family was quarantined.” (Thus Tory’s “people didn’t dare go in.”) A book on the Johnson family and the church has also been written and is on sale at the gift shop. “My sister was looking at this book, and said half the things aren’t true. But, you gotta get the tourists,” Glenda concluded, then added, “its selective memory of history.”

As I noted in Chapter 4, the geographer David Lowenthal looks at historic facts of the past, and how they are remade for the present. Lowenthal argues that facts are often distorted to fit how individuals want to perceive them. As some scientific facts that aren’t proven really true, or really false are presented as “truth” so too are historical facts. Those individuals representing the region to tourists, the Hospitality Association, have grasped the power to decide what cultural facts to present and how to present them. The discourse which constitutes the historical landscape presented to outsiders includes only those voices which agree with the cultural facts. And those who do not present the “true” facts—other tour companies—should not be allowed to speak for the landform. Control over the voices in the

discourse is being attempted. This act of power and limiting of democracy is done to benefit the Hospitality Association.

Facts are also altered when it comes to personalizing the landform, and perpetuating the personalization. Family names are sometimes changed, or taken on to claim a part of the hills. Sophie's Hollow is named after Sophius Larson, but the name has been altered to Sophie's, to the irritation of some longtime residents. "Mann Hollow Overlook," advertised in one of the sample Hospitality Association tours, is or is not located at the top of an area called Mann Hollow, depending upon who you ask. The "Mann Hollow Overlook" is also known as the "Loess Hills Scenic Overlook."

The State Forester, Kirby, mentioned one day he encountered a Hospitality Association bus at the Scenic Overlook. "I've been up there before in just civilian clothes, no DNR vehicle whatsoever and listened in on what they said and they didn't even mention the State forest even bein' around. They didn't even mention that the State forest paid for that Overlook up there. They think the county did it. A lot of misrepresentation of facts. That's what baffles me sometimes. Surprises me. And then it doesn't."

"Do you think it's cuz they don't know?" I pondered.

"I think a little bit of both," Kirby responded. "I think, in some cases, they wanna claim somethin' that's not really claimable." These claims all represent identity issues—placing a family name on a state built overlook, and claiming local control as opposed to state control in the building of the overlook. Kirby is also protecting his affiliation with the landform, connected to it as an employee of the state. Issues of ownership over promotion of the hills become very important because of the issues of identity involved.

A third argument for why members of the Hospitality Association should be afforded the right to promote the hills over others is because they are "Loess Hills" people, an argument seen most clearly in the marketing of a "Loess Hills Calendar."

This calendar had originally been produced through "Loess Hills Productions" in Mapleton. When the producer decided he no longer wanted to be involved, individuals at the Hospitality Association took over production. At the same time, there were rumors that Frank, a photographer who says he "lives in the shadow of the Loess Hills," may also be

producing a calendar. Frank's photos of the hills are accepted for use on postcards and other items sold at the Hospitality Association's gift shop.

At the 1998 Loess Hills Hospitality Association meeting approximately 75 members attended. We were told of the potential second calendar, and how we could make sure we were purchasing the "right" one—that is, the one produced by the Hospitality Association. It "has the official Loess Hills trademark," (the Scenic Byway logo) and it will have photos from "Loess Hills People" and it will be "locally produced." Frank does not, we were told, "live in the Loess Hills" and "is not local."

And in a snap, someone who has been active in the Loess Hills Prairie Seminar since its inception, whose other photos *are* accepted for promotional purposes, is pushed out of the landform and being denied an identity associated with the landform. While Frank never went ahead with his plan, an attempt to squash his right to speak for the hills had been made. There was an attempt to take away his power to speak for the hills through his photos—to limit his role in the discourse—to limit democracy.

These social dynamics within the discourse indicated they are not only ones of identity, but making money as well. Loess Hills Afghans made in South Carolina and mugs which once bore "made in China" are fine for sale in the gift shop with "Loess Hills products made by Loess Hills artists." But when the competition to make money gets too close, physical and social boundaries are drawn.

This drawing of boundaries also extends to communities. Even though there are some residents in Moorhead, as Malinda noted in Chapter 4, who will not go into the Hospitality Association, the two entities are seen as the same. And therefore the ownership issue the Hospitality Association is involved in becomes a community wide issue. I mention in Chapter 4 what the attention on the landform has done for Moorhead, beneficial impacts, I believe. But the attention has also created jealousy between communities, primarily due to territoriality.

Ellie and I were talking about how some of her friends in Pisgah now view Moorhead. "I think there's a little jealousy," said Ellie. "Because they don't have the store down there, the building, the Loess Hills crafts and stuff like that. They get tours, they feed 'em at the

churches and stuff, but they're not getting the publicity like Moorhead, see? And it's just like two little kids fightin', you know. 'We got more than you have,'" she said, mimicking kids (and adults).

"Moorhead is more Moorhead, Pisgah is more regional," Kirby, who lives in Pisgah, told me. "I've even started to notice it. At first I thought they were just saying that." But Kirby has (as have I) heard the vocal disgruntlement over the placement of the Loess Hills Forest Center being located in Pisgah rather than in or near Moorhead.

When each community had a school, rivalries, especially in sports, were strong. With consolidation of schools in rural communities, the memories still remain, but the sports teams do not. Tourism competition has now replaced sports competition. The issue is no longer who won the Thursday night football game, it's who is benefiting from the tour buses coming in, or from anything having to do with the hills. And this is causing competition among communities and a continual focus of the Hospitality Association on Moorhead rather than on the region.

A former Board member originally from Moorhead told me of several reasons for resigning their position. One was lack of time. But another was concern for the direction which the Hospitality Association was taking. "Its really important to include people from outside of Moorhead. There's becoming a more narrow focus on the board, and those of us not in Moorhead are noticing it. They're not getting people from outside the area involved."

Residents' voices now included in the dominant discourse are usually those of the Hospitality Board members. With the narrowing of representation on the board to Moorhead, a narrowing of voices heard is also occurring, an act of power which is resulting in *minimizing democracy*.

"What's happened," Trace felt, "is because of the importance that came to this project and the office that's in Moorhead, the Moorheadites get all this glow on and so they don't wanna get out of the limelight. But the problem is when they take over the project, they reduce it to their own understanding of where they're at and their own vision. And people in rural towns see where they're at. They lose this area concept and they reduce it down to 'what can it do for me?'"

“It’s not just Moorhead,” Trace continued. “It’s just the way things are around here. The other towns have become jealous of Moorhead because Moorhead’s been walking around with their head up in the air with shoulders goin’ ‘do do do do do do’ to everyone else. That’s just what little towns do to each other. Well, the other towns get jealous and so they start condemning them for it when, in fact, if it happened in Soldier, they’d get their heads in the air and everybody’d be picking on them. Or if Pisgah got it or if Onawa got it. It’s just the way they are around these small towns.”

As this narrowing of democracy occurs, as control is wrestled over whose voices are allowed to speak for the hills, those voices in this specific discourse between communities become “jealous.” The communities “fight like little kids,” says Ellie, and “condemn” Moorhead, notes Trace on the counter reacting to being controlled.

The rivalry over ownership extends beyond neighboring communities and counties to urban areas in the region—primarily Council Bluffs and Sioux City. In her work with the Hospitality Association Penny stated she has seen, “Fear on part of the Hospitality Association that activities are going to be taken away from them. I think they look at their metropolitan neighbors, and say ‘they have professional staff, they have more money, they have more resources. What makes us unique is the fact that we are rural and that we are volunteers and that we don’t have much money.’” The tension is also between small town and big city, rural and urban.

Fear of an urban presence and what that presence will do is a concern, because urban, as seen in Chapters 3 and 4, implies the opposite of rural. Naomi spoke for many of the residents when she said she was proud that it was a “grass roots effort” and someone didn’t come in from the outside. Those who have worked on tourism are proud that they are rural, that this was a grass-roots effort, and that it has culminated in what it is. But there is also fear that just as the Hospitality Association is exercising power within the hill region, they too will be subjected to it, especially as the urban areas get increasingly involved in promotion of the hills.

I asked a Hospitality Association representative who “has the right to promote the hills.” “That’s a good question,” she said, “and I think it’s one of the issues that’s not been

settled yet. But I guess I'm thinking that of course, we're doing it, because nobody else is doing it. But it may be that it should be the county tourism and the conservation board."

"What about those who don't live in the hills but want to bring tourists here?" I asked.

"I don't have any problem with it as long as they stay within our rules, our formats and don't just unload at the nearest hill and let 'em climb up on top."

It's not a problem for others to promote the hills as long as those who do stay within "our rules" and "our formats"—language which indicates ownership of the landform and the view it presents. The concern of this representative appears to be towards preservation. However, those most active within the Hospitality Association also have a diverse range of views as to where they should be going with tourism. And some views appear to be driven more by personal agendas, of which making money is one.

"I'm gonna be very candid with you," a former Board member told me. "I'm not happy with what's happening. I'm not happy with the quality of the product that's being produced. I think it's a much lower quality product than what it was when we started. And we haven't been in this business very long, but I think we've lost. My opinion is it is being driven from an economic standpoint now. And we have lost the courage to evaluate it and to make it stand on the social acceptance and the ecological acceptance that really were the pyramid things that we wanted to accomplish. I have great fear because we have, I think, turned towards making a buck, which in all reality is not happening, but it seems to drive the decision-making process."

Two major items listed when I asked those active in the Hospitality Association what they felt were needed were "paved roads" and "more funds." Paved roads, some promoters of tourism believe, would allow the motorcoaches to go on more roads (some bus drivers refuse to take dirt and gravel roads) and therefore bring in more tourism.

"They're gonna continue some asphalt pavement into the State Park up there," Kirby told me when we talked at the Forest Headquarters. "I hate to see that because it's gonna kill some of the trees along that road that makes it such a cathedral look."

"Who makes that decision?" I wondered.

"Oh, that's been in the works for 10-15 years but it kept getting pushed down farther

and farther. Moorhead's given pressure on it. I give 'em flack for trying to want to make Preparation Canyon State Park into an amusement park. We had a public meeting down here a year or two ago and Mike Carrier, the parks administrator, was surprised at how much people from Moorhead wanted to get pavement, electricity, [and] closed-in shelters."

"I understand they want some things to happen for their town," Kirby acknowledged. "I can accept that, but destroying the park, in my opinion, doesn't seem like the thing to do. I hate to see us over-develop everything for little profit or little anything. In some cases I think it's neat that you can drive on gravel roads."

I believe other residents would agree with him. Pavement on Larpenteur Road, part of the Scenic Byway occurred at the same time motorcoach tours began rolling through the area. There are several reasons given why portions of the road were paved, but some residents believe it was to bring in more tourists. Not all residents were happy with that decision. Some did not want it paved, and "its caused some problems. Some people like to live on gravel, you know," a Monona County employee informed me. Especially those who "just want to be left alone," as Ted noted earlier.

Attempts to control the territory of the Loess Hills are occurring. Fears by the Hospitality Association that voices other than theirs will be heard is causing them to continually narrow their focus of democracy, to limit the voices. These fears have also steered the Hospitality Association onto an economically driven agenda, speaking for all residents in the area on desiring renovations, when it is a minority making the request. These requests and some subsequent renovation are starting to affect the physical and social territory of the Loess Hills. When power is used to limit democracy to a few voices which are requesting more pavement, a "fading" and "discoloration" of places, as predicted by Tony Hiss, may occur, and a favorite cathedral look to the park is lost.

Imagined Loess Hills Communities

With the struggle over who has the right to promote the hills comes a more precise drawing of where the landform boundaries are. “Territoriality “is a strategy to establish degrees of access to people, things and relationships” and can be asserted in several ways, writes Sack.⁷ One way in which territoriality is being asserted in the Loess Hills is by drawing of boundaries by different groups attempting to control the landform for their interests. Where the boundaries of the constituted landform are drawn depends upon the interest of the group, and the power exercised.

The boundary issue is one which differs depending on which side of the hills is being discussed.⁸ As I indicated in previous chapters, its very obvious on the western side where the landform is, and is not. This, however, doesn’t stop Onawa from claiming some ownership to the hills (nor should it). But they are cautious of their claim, making sure it doesn’t override Onawa’s own identity.

The postcard mentioned in Chapter 1 and at the beginning of this chapter already indicates when political purposes such as status and monetary value are served, Onawa will claim the hills. “However much some of the Onawa area don’t want to have anything to do with the hills over here.” Grant noted one day we discussed the division in the county, “I saw in some of their literature, ‘Onawa: the Gateway to the Loess Hills.’ Now is that capitalizing on something or not? They don’t want to have anything to do with ‘em maybe but they’re not above using ‘em a little bit if they get the chance. That was amusing,” he said with a smile. So when the hills can benefit Onawa, they are claimed even by some “flatlanders.”

But not everyone wants Onawa to claim the hills, nor to be included in a hill discussion. I met up with Blinky and Maggie at the Loess Hills Museum, located in Onawa. This museum was formally called the Monona County Museum, and is operated by the Monona County Historical Society. Blinky noted she felt Onawa was taking more of an interest in the hills. “Because they named our museum the Loess Hills Museum and it’s always been just Monona County Museum,” she stated, giving her reasoning.

But Maggie corrected her. They “had to do that,” Maggie said. “There was another Monona Museum, because there’s a Monona Iowa, and so we came up with all sorts of names, and we came up with this name long before it was famous and used by everyone.”

The Museum name change, as far as I can tell from their newsletter, took place in 1996 or 1997. But Maggie's comment indicates again the recency the term has been introduced to some individuals.

"Loess Hills Museum" is actually seldom used. Announcements in the local papers still use "Monona County Museum" and seldom do I see "Loess Hills" attached to it. And after listening to Maggie, Blinky supported Maggie's comments. "One of the gals said, 'I don't know why they named it Loess Hills. We ain't got nothin' to do with the Loess Hills'"—this time, revealing an out and out refusal to take on the name.

Although reluctant to use Loess Hills, some of those at Monona County Museum do, but want it made known that "we came up with this name long before it was famous and used by everyone." A disclaimer is immediately made, a statement which distances their use of the name with the tourism efforts—a way of maintaining their own, separate identity, even if it's the same name. Just like siblings.

"One of the gals" isn't the only one who balks at taking on the name and perpetuating it. The *Onawa Democrat*, one of the two weekly papers in town, is reluctant to promote the hills. "Home of the Lewis & Clark Festival and Birthplace of the Eskimo Pie" its' cover proclaims on the left side, accompanied by a graphic of a keel boat (the boat used for Lewis and Clark's Discovery tour, a replica of which sits in Blue Lake in Onawa). "Graffiti Night, Iowa's Largest Cruise Night" it proclaims on the right side of the cover, accompanied by a graphic of an antique car. Only recently has the state of Iowa with a band running through it been added, with the caption "ONAWA The Widest Main Street in the U.S.A." and underneath. "'Gateway to the Loess Hills'" Chamber of Commerce."

Articles on the hills sent to both Onawa papers by interested parties are printed continuously in the *Onawa Sentinel*, and sporadically in the *Democrat*. Front page Loess Hills stories in the *Sentinel* are third, fourth page in the *Democrat*. Part of this is due to the stigma the hills still have. As I relate in Chapter 4, when I called the *Onawa Democrat* to begin my subscription to the paper, and I gave my address, the voice on the other end was impressed by "Orange Ave." But when I added my town, "Castana." I was told, "So much for the impressive."

“Onawa thinks more in terms of this bottom Sioux River, Lewis and Clark Park, Lewis and Clark Lake, the widest Main Street in the United States, the home of the Eskimo Pie. You don’t see ‘em promotin’ the Loess Hills,” Clint from Onawa told me. You don’t because they claim, and want, their own identity—not an unrealistic expectation. And Onawa’s identity is being overshadowed by the recognition of the hills and the discourses occurring. The “hillbillies” are now in the favored position and there is concern by those promoting Onawa and the flatlands they will be neglected.

I also sensed this. I, too, was giving attention to one portion of the county over another. One night while in Janie’s Pub in Moorhead, George gave me his business card. He encouraged me to come to Blencoe on Tuesdays, when the Senior Citizens had a get together. “Come see what the flatlanders have to say,” he told me. And when I visited with members of the Loess Hills/Monona County Historical Society I was encouraged to not “leave out the rest of the county.” My presence substantiated to some that their landscape is important (why would I be out here if it wasn’t) and to others that theirs is less so (why wouldn’t I be there if it was).

One day as I drove back to the hills, through the river bottom, I thought, “why would you want to promote an area you don’t live in? When you live in the flat ground, but make a fuss about the hills, aren’t you implicitly saying, something about the beauty (or lack of) in the area in which you live?” There can be an inherently unequal character to calling one place “beautiful.” It implies others may not be.

The (perhaps) ironic aspect of this division is, as much as it is maintained within the county, the hills and the river bottom need each other. “I think that the Loess Hills and the Missouri Valley are a pair,” Art Bettis told me as he held both hands together, palms up. “They belong together.” The flatness of the Missouri River Valley is needed to show the abruptness of the hills that Ellie and others describe in Chapter 3 as “unique.” As much as some hill residents seem to loath Onawa, they will retire there, because “that’s where the doctors are.” The hills needed the River Valley for creation of the hills millennia ago. They need each other for the physical contrast which exists today. And they need each other and each other’s resources to survive in rural America and parts somewhat forgotten by the State.

The dynamics and claiming of the landform are different on the eastern side of the hills. The way the landform was shaped plays a large role in why this is so. “Nature just doesn’t have a sharp boundary there. When you have a wind blown deposit that’s accumulated its sources and it starts to accumulate right next to it, then as the wind carries it east, it’s not gonna drop all of it in one place. It’s gonna be a very gradual change from thick to thin taking place over many miles,” Jean Prior noted.

The landscape is not substantially different as it is on the western edge. The cultural differences are also less “sharp.” There is not the “hillbilly” vs. “flatlanders” distinction which takes place on the western part of Monona County. Therefore the claim to being in the hills is found much more on the eastern side. But that doesn’t stop attempts at boundaries being drawn, attempts at claiming territory, and excluding voices.

Frank, who “lives in the shadow of the hills,” is on the east side of the landform, yet considered outside of the hills. “They claim now they go way over to Denison, Carroll, way over in that country,” Percy, a Hospitality Association tour guide told me. “They claim that’s still Loess Hills but, to me, it never used to be. I always thought they was tryin’ to get our glory! They seem to be rather adamant about it. I mean, we know we are but it seems like they want to [be].”

Those in Dunlap also feel they’re in the hills, like Jill, who told me in Chapter 4, “I’ve always been a hill girl,” and Donna Barry (a state representative who recently introduced legislation into the Iowa House for funding of the Loess Hills Alliance) who says she has lived in the hills “her whole life.”⁹ But ask those who are most adamant about the boundaries, and Dunlap is definitely not in the Loess Hills, nor is it in the Golden Hills RC&D map used to mark the territory.

Demarcation and attempted control of territories are two tactics of power Foucault and Sack (in slightly different words) see played out in space. These tactics of power are clearly occurring by some of the residents, who are placing stringent boundaries upon the landform. The residents’ earlier remarks show that, as with pronunciation of the term “loess,” the boundaries of the landform have become very important for promotion and identity.

“Does it matter where the boundaries of the Loess Hills are?” I asked a Hospitality Association representative. “The keyword is ‘matter,’” she told me. “I guess that depends upon what your goal for the area is. [I] would like to see more claim to be a part of the hills. But again, that depends on what that claim bestows them.” An attempt to put limits on what the claim to the landform will give others is made, controlling access to the landform.

“I’d say it’s very, very important as we promote them,” Penny of Western Iowa Tourism told me when I asked about importance of boundaries. “If the reason for selling the product is its uniqueness, then, you need to stay within the true boundaries, the landform that has been designated. If you’re saying ‘Come to the Loess Hills and we’ll share with you a unique experience in a natural setting that is unique to North America,’ then, in fact, you have to stay with that landform.” As some were emphatic about using *a* certain pronunciation because of identity, so are too some emphatic about the boundaries.

Penny referred to the map from Golden Hills RC&D. “I think in our Scenic Byway brochure, it indicates the landform on here. And that’s what’s acknowledged as *the* Loess Hills.” The Golden Hills RC&D map is based on the geological placement of the boundaries established by the Geological Survey Bureau, primarily Jean Prior’s map. Golden Hills has since then placed more exact boundaries on the hills by townships, so that now the boundary is, as an example from Annie, “Highway K67 beginning at the Woodbury line, south to the intersection with L12.”

Jean Prior said when she draws the lines, “You just have to decide, well, the Loess Hills have these peaks and saddles, and they have cat steps, and they have a very high density of drainage per unit area. They have certain soil types. And you just group as many of those things together—the appearance, the terrain, the thickness of the loess, the density of the drainage, the soil types, the actual topographic cuts, the type of road cuts. And you say when those things are all together, those are the Loess Hills.”

When I asked Jean about the boundaries, she told me, “Obviously, the western boundary is very sharp. It’s just like a coastline. But once you leave that flat flood plain of the Missouri and that first abrupt change up into the hills, then as you go east, almost anywhere along the whole north-south segment of the hills, you’re very hard pressed then to

say when you're out of them. There isn't anyplace where you can definitely say that. It's just not that clear."

Geologist Art Bettis, commenting on the world of science noted, "You know, scientists like to get in these semantic arguments about what's what," and summed up his answer on the boundary issue by saying, "If you were to draw those lines, in reality there's a big wide and gray spot out there." But in the "boundaries of the Loess Hills discourse," its the residents, primarily those involved in tourism who are saying "what's what," and the scientists who are remaining neutral and objective.

Maps have long been seen as "instruments of power."¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities*, talks about socially constructed national boundaries—boundaries which in reality are quite arbitrary, but very real for those living in the specific nation. In the Loess Hills, this social construction has also taken place. The question of boundaries, another scientific "fact," was not an issue in the discourse *until* the discourse began, for wanting a hills identity was, until recently, not a popular thing to desire.

Boundaries, which are often contested concepts, gain a life of their own, aided, Anderson suggests, by the construction of maps. With a map comes documentation which makes the boundary in some eyes "official" and therefore makes the boundary more real. Maps become another important part of the "statement" in the discourse over ownership.

Maps of the hills' landform have become instruments of power for those wanting to promote the hills for their own purpose. Foucault suggests the use of power is not always a conscious activity. Nor is it always done maliciously. Yet there are still democratic consequences from these actions. Individuals and their voices are excluded from the discourse and attempts are made to take away identity to the landform. The base map constructed by scientists who say the boundaries are "not that clear," is used as "proof" of boundaries by those residents attempting to exert control and power over voices. Science is again being used as an ideological and material resource by promoters of the hills. Those exerting power and limiting democracy have built Imagined Loess Hills Communities.

The boundaries of the landform are *very* variable, and the lines drawn depend upon the stakes and interests held. For example, the House version of the Loess Hills Alliance bill

limits the membership of the Board of Directors to those individuals within the seven counties where the landform supposedly sits. Personal land use issues are of great concern to Donna Barry, the Representative from Dunlap who wrote the bill. She and others want to limit voices to only those who may have land in the landform, as drawn by the scientific maps. Yet Representative Barry is not in the landform, looking at the maps being used.

A community can be designated a “Loess Hills Community” if they agree to participate in educational training on the hills and hospitality training. Annie of the Golden Hills RC&D, explained that the National Park Services’ “Loess Hills Communities” could be almost anywhere, “even if,” I asked, “looking at a map, they’re not in the Loess Hills?” The answer is yes—as long as they are willing to share information about the hills and be hospitable.

Annie explained, “A lot of times, if you’re visiting western Iowa, maybe you came to see the Loess Hills, maybe you didn’t, but you might go to the windmill at Elk Horn and you might stop at the antique shops at Walnut.¹¹ So I think those places should have the opportunity to be if they wish, knowing that it’s going to be focused on the Loess Hills. So we’re figuring it could be for anyone.” It is “for anyone” as long as they’re willing to provide information on the hills. Those communities which choose to participate will be given “Loess Hills Attraction” and “Loess Hills Community” signs if they have “a certain level of visitor services.” The RC&D, as they did with the Scenic Byway, is broadening the boundaries, opening up the discourse, *if* the communities they open this to will promote the landform. What the voices must say and do is still a stipulation.

Larry Benne, who heads the Loess Hills Prairie Seminar told me that in early February he expects to start getting calls. “Within weeks the phone will be ringing, wondering about *our* Loess Hills, how is *our* seminar coming?” as he mentioned the Brogie brothers from Nebraska who are in charge of 6:00 a.m. “Bird walk,” and Carol Schwarting from South Dakota and her two daughters from Kansas who facilitate the “Reptiles and Amphibians” session. Larry said one of his main concerns at the Seminar is “anyone who wants a forum, has a forum,” indicating the level of democracy strived for in the Prairie Seminar. Those who attend the Seminar also claim ownership to the hills and the Seminar, seen in use of the word

“our.” But who can belong is broadly defined, because of the educational outcome desired.

While “They like to think they’re in the hills but they’re not,” is said with a smile, there is serious intent behind the statement. Ownership over the landform is not just an issue at the local and state level. It is occurring at the federal level as well. Both Iowa Senators Harkin and Grassley have introduced separate legislation for a federal study of the hills, with each claiming they were the “first” to show interest in federal designation. “Now Harkin’s and Grassley’s similar but not identical bills are set to be considered by a Senate subcommittee on the same day.”¹² As individuals increasingly enter the discourse constituting the Loess Hills, so too will power situations increase.

Intentional Exclusion

With boundaries being drawn, comes exclusion of voices. This is at times an unconscious democratic consequence of the discourse. But several voices are also consciously excluded from this discourse. Those voices shut out include the voices of Trace and Desiree, and the voices from a settlement of Black immigrants.

“After they kicked Trace out, Desiree was next....”

At the Open House held after the Loess Hills Overlook Dedication, Bill, who’s been involved in the tourism efforts since their onset, mentioned the lack of credit Trace received during acknowledgments made. “I know,” said Bob, who’s also been heavily involved in tourism efforts since the beginning. “He never gets the recognition he deserves.” Later I asked them both about this, and began to learn that while Trace’s ideas are still going strong, he is for all practical purposes, “out” of the Hospitality Association. I wondered why.

Trace is an outsider, as he himself acknowledges in Chapter 2. “I had old roots but I was detached from the area. And so as an outsider, I had to rely on my friends to come visit me.” He also felt like he grew up “on an island,” with parents who were not from the area originally, thus impacting his “not local” label. And Trace inferred to some of what happened to him in Chapter 2, in response to his friends’ perceptions that everyone in small towns was so nice. “Of course that’s when they went to town and everybody was drunk.” Trace informed me several times I was in the “honeymoon stage” when I commented on the

kindness of various residents.

Trace's "outsider" status worked both for, and against him. When discussing his ideas, Desiree noted, "It's just all top of the head. And you see, that's what the Moorhead people didn't want or didn't like. He'd come up with a bright idea while he was sitting there. Somebody else was thinking about somethin' else and 'Come on now, Trace, we're not worried about that right now.' But, you see, they listened to Trace at first because he had been away for quite awhile."

They also listened because here was someone who has those exotic stories from Chapter 2, attached to his name. Trace "had traveled," had "seen other places," and knew what those who had stayed put didn't. The initial Hospitality Association members listened too, because at that time, the late 1980's, rural communities were desperate for anything to lift them up, economically and spiritually, after the hard times they were going through with the farm crisis. The hill people were ready for something different, were very eager, and very supportive.

At some point, though, the acceptance of Trace changed, because he is perceived as "different" and didn't do things in the usual manner. "Trace made a real contribution with his squiggly signs [Scenic Byway logo]," Donald told me. "He's a local visionary. And he's not well accepted by the people. I mean, Trace's different and a lot of people have a hard time with him."

"I think we've sure implemented his ideas though," Lydia noted.

"Yes," Donald said, "They've accepted his ideas but..." He didn't finish, but rather said, "He's a true visionary, Trace is."

"No one wants to recognize that he had anything to do with it," Bob explained to me. "Trace is a very interesting, very deep individual. Odd, different but I have such huge respect for him with regard to the hills and the tourism. He really was the author, the originator, of the idea of motor coach tours in the hills. It was his organization. It was his baby when it started out. The thing about Trace was people couldn't accept was that he was a spontaneous individual. He did what felt right. He, most of the time, didn't ask anybody whether he should or shouldn't. He just did it. And he really ran into some people in Moorhead that

resented him for that.”

Bob continued. “They could not accept his lifestyle. To them he was a deadbeat SOB, never held a job, never took care of his mother, always ran off, etc. And here he is trying to screw around with us and ‘by god he’s not going to.’ And those people are still there. Those people drove him away. Those people manipulated, influenced through a variety of ways views other people had about Trace. [They] changed the perceptions, destroyed the trust, destroyed the credibility associated with it. And then, of course, Trace did the typical thing, just picked up and left. Which was only reinforcement for the story that was being told.”

Trace is a definite Other—someone who goes against the grain—in conservative, “rural America.” And the statement, “they could not accept his lifestyle,” says a lot about how many in the community view him. Trace, proudly, has never held a full-time job, but holds many jobs, a work ethic that those in rural Iowa don’t accept too easily. This type of lifestyle did not work well with those he was worked closely with.

Referring to what happened early on, Desiree offered, “They won’t listen to Trace. When Trace comes in it, they just freeze.” I too, had noticed the tension sometimes created when Trace would walk through the door of the Hospitality Association.

When I asked those in the Hospitality Association aware of the situation (many, like Freda, are not) about the conflict, most were uneasy talking about it, and told me they were “glad the tape recorder is off.” One Association representative told me “Trace burned a lot of bridges and wouldn’t work with certain people,” referring back to the original problems with Golden Hills. “It’s no longer Trace’s organization, now it’s ours and we’ve put as much time into it as he has,” another told me. “It had to be Trace’s way or no way at all,” said a third.

Bill, who worked heavily with all individuals involved in this discussion, gave his perception. “Trace would talk to all board members beforehand and by the time it got to the meeting, everything would be decided. I told him you can’t do that. He fell out of favor with the board.”

The Hospitality Association did stand up and recognize Trace at the 1998 Loess Hills Hospitality Association meeting after a Board member sympathetic to Trace asked that a

“thank you” be sent to him. Only he wasn’t there. After the meeting I told Trace they had a certificate of recognition for him.

“I really appreciate the fact they gave me an appreciation,” he commented. “Course they didn’t tell me so I couldn’t be there to get it, and they wanted it to be that way. They’re always perplexed when I show up. They know how I feel about how they’ve handled things. I really don’t hold it against them. I understand, I do. If I were in their place, I’d probably do the same thing. If you start to make waves, they will exclude you because they feel uncomfortable in your presence. So when you start to be creative, you intimidate the rest of the people and they start to shun you and the last thing in the world you wanna do is be shunned out of the tribe,” noted Trace, giving me his perception of what happened. It was important to Trace that I “get this on tape” and that “now it’s on the record.”

The Hospitality Association feels shoved out of the dominant discourse by several actors, the Golden Hills RC&D being just one I discussed. But as they are subjected to power, so do they exercise it. Those in the Hospitality Association have a vision of democracy which included Trace’s idea, but excludes Trace.

But Trace also has a vision of democracy, and his own ideas as to who should “speak” for the hills. When discussing the *Des Moines Register* and their national park crusade, Trace told me “The photos are nice. But Bill Leonard’s still going about it the wrong way. He has no local support. He hasn’t talked to me, or Willy or Norm. He’s doing it top down and it doesn’t work that way out here.” “He hasn’t talked to me,” indicates the ownership Trace still feels on the idea of promoting the hills.

Desiree told me of the time she and Trace were giving one of the first motorcoach tours. “Trace had the microphone in Monona County. I just assumed when we got to Harrison County, he’d let me do the tour. Well, we got to Harrison County and he kept the microphone. Then when we got near to the county school where I was a teacher, I thought he’d give me the microphone. No, he just told them I was a teacher there!” As Trace is subjected to power, so too does he exercise it, by wanting to control who should, and who should not, represent the hills.

“This is all about interpersonal relationships,” Bill told me when attempting to

explain the history of what occurred (“there’s a backpack of tapes on the subject” I was warned). “Trace’s not getting credit, the Hospitality Association, they want him out of there. After Trace, Desiree was the next to go. She was shunned. She kept wanting more buses and the rest were working as volunteers.” The Board members were upset that Desiree was making money from the hills, while they were volunteering their time and effort.

Bob noted that Trace and Desiree, “get no recognition for the fact that it was their idea. It hurts me when you get these gatherings of people and then you have the Loess Hills Hospitality Association take credit for all these glorious things that have been done when, in fact, the organization is the result of something else.”

Desiree is farther removed from the day-to-day activities of the Hospitality Association and thus I heard less comments regarding her. The few I did hear focused on her wanting more Hospitality Association buses to come to her Inn, and wanting the Scenic Byway to pass by her business. “She made no bones about that,” I was told by one of the early players. The tension over ownership and monetary issues of the landform came into play between Desiree and the Hospitality Association.

I asked Desiree how she felt about the way things have gone. “There wasn’t the trust that you needed,” she told me, echoing Tim’s earlier comments on the breakdown in trust. “I think rather than focusing on the project, it became kind of a power struggle over ‘who’s gonna be the power person?’ rather than ‘let’s do this because this is going to be good for the project.’”

“It does kind of hurt sometimes.” Desiree continued, “when you think that you started something and if they don’t give you credit for what you did but big deal.” Yet it is a big deal to Desiree. She still remembers it.

Then she continued, “If it’s going, that’s what you want. That was the idea. But it could’ve gone so much farther and in more directions and involved more people if they hadn’t tried to package it in and just say, ‘Only these participate.’”

“Did you want to continue being involved?” I asked.

“They [the Hospitality Association] just kind of didn’t listen anymore, you know. If you said something, everybody was against it. And there were people up there that wanted it

[there] and so it just kind of gradually happened.” “The trust that was there at the beginning” eroded as a narrowing of voices increased, a narrowing which resulted in exclusion of voices, allowing only “these participate.”

I can't entirely agree with Bob's statement that “No one wants to recognize that Trace had anything to do with it.” Tory began our bus tour by saying, “In 1988, Solider, Iowa had its centennial. And two men that were friends of Trace said to him, “You know, these hills are unique.” This story is told on every Hospitality Association tour. I have been at the Castana Ladies Thursday Lunch Club when Malinda and Ginger presented information on the Hospitality Association, told the “Trace” story and noted, “Trace has been the driving force behind this all the time, when something doesn't work, he keeps pushing and pushing. He's been a tremendous help to all of us down there.” Trace's name is kept alive, although Desiree's is hardly mentioned. She is a much less recognized player, and also a less visible figure, as her home is in Missouri Valley.

The Hospitality Association did accept Trace and Desiree's ideas, as Lydia and Donald noted. The motorcoach tours are still going. Yet Trace and Desiree, early players in the initial discourse which constituted the “Loess Hills,” have been consciously excluded, an act of power and democracy in the “new” landform.

“That's not what we call it...”

Jacob mentions in Chapter 4 the “Negro Cemetery,” he and other residents from the Whiting Care Center went to one day. This cemetery, as I noted in Chapter 3, has the remains of approximately 20 Black residents of the hills, most of whom were buried in the late 1800's. The Hospitality Association and Whiting Care Center are making efforts to share this part of the collective history, to open up the landform. But there are other residents who do not want these voices to be heard. They have attempted to make sure the voices will never be heard, for they do not want democracy for these early immigrants.

Every year at the Loess Hills Prairie Seminar, Clint offers a tour of the cemetery, taking an old school bus of Seminar participants on an “Early Settlers Tour.” After taking Clint's tour I told several residents about it, as I found the story fascinating. “I went to the

Black cemetery,” I told them, eager to talk more about it. “That’s not what we call it,” I was told with a snicker.

“What do you call it?” I wondered.

“It’s nigger cemetery.” A long pause ensued.

One day while volunteering at the Hospitality Association, a group of six came in—two locals with four visitors from out of town. The locals were taking their visitors around the hills, and asking me what places I would recommend. As I pondered, one told me, “I wanted to take them to nigger cemetery, but they didn’t want to go.”

Again a long pause ensued.

“We tried to get you to go to the Norwegian cemetery,” they finally responded, to fill the empty space.

“Nigger cemetery,” just like “hillbilly” and “bottomground” is also part of the hill vernacular, but a term and an issue not many want to discuss nor be identified as discussing.

One June day while Bessie, Robo, and I talked and ate fresh cake and ice cream, our discussion turned to the cemetery. They were one of the first to tell me people didn’t like to talk about it. I asked why it is kept so secret. “Well, no one asks about it much because they are afraid if they look too far, there were mixed marriages, and so there are negroes that they don’t want in their family tree,” Bessie told me.

When I asked one resident who they considered “local,” I was told, “I would consider some of the offspring from the Adam Mier [the farmer who the immigrants worked for] Black people that came through.”

“Are any of those offspring around?” I asked.

“Well, there probably is many of ‘em around but they don’t wanna be known.”

They gave me names of those “rumored” to be the offspring, “off the record.” I don’t remember the names. What I do remember is that it was seen as shameful to have African American descent. It was so shameful, some felt, that it is commonly believed descendants of those buried in the cemetery vandalized the tombstones, so names couldn’t be identified, and links drawn. Attempts to destroy, and to keep the voices of those in the cemetery out of the “white” discourse were made.

Inadvertently, tourism has brought this about. The vandalism occurred in the early 1990's, after the attention to the area began, and an article about the cemetery was placed in the Onawa papers as part of the Loess Hills Hospitality Association Cultural Center's education on the area. Combined with a reporter from Council Bluffs who came to do research on the story, the increased attention on the cemetery is rumored to have "scared" the offspring. Heritage is a concept seen in Chapter 3 to be intensely important to those in the hills. Yet heritage is asserted only when the heritage is "white." Those not white are excluded from the landscape, and from the discourse. This was seen earlier in the comment regarding fear of "foreigners." And with the exception of Marie Pearson, every voice in this dissertation is white. Some residents want to keep it that way.

I was curious why Clint was the only one I knew to make a point of talking about the cemetery and include it on his tour. "I do that because I'm trying to show the various peoples who have been in the hills and the impact that they've had on the hills," he replied, "whether they're the prehistoric Indians that roamed these hills, or whether it's the Danes that lived down there south in that Ingemann Church, or whether it's those Blacks that live over there or whether it's the people who live here now."

I had mentioned not everyone wants to discuss the cemetery and its history with me. "I'll tell you why they don't want to talk about it," Clint told me, "because many of 'em are descendants of 'em. That's one of the reasons the graveyard's been vandalized. Many of the stones have been taken. It's a part of their past that they..." he drifted off, "And I find that....," he drifted off again.

"Sad," Becky, his wife, filled in. "Yeah," agreed Clint. An attempt is clearly being made by some individuals to not let voices be heard, voices of ancestors who don't fit the mode of Midwest "rural America." The hills are "white," some residents feel. But Clint (and others) reject this, aware of the controversy the cemetery causes in the area, yet feeling it important it be brought out in the history of the county. Democracy for these immigrants is attempted by Clint, by the Hospitality Association, and by the Whiting Care Center. But their attempts are thwarted at times. With the exclusion of these voices, racism is visibly brought into the discourse.

Who is speaking?

There are also on-going features within the discourse which aren't necessarily excluding voices, but I believe are misrepresenting voices. Speaking *for* someone implies the power to speak has been bestowed upon the individual talking. This right has not been bestowed, but is still taken. Residents are being presented to the outside world in ways which are not always accurate, they have not been asked about, given their permission for, nor always aware of. They are being marketed as "hospitable," a label attached to residents of the hills (and more broadly to all residents of Iowa), and they are being portrayed as desiring a national park.

"Iowa, we make you smile"

According to Nancy Landess, the Administrator for the Department of Tourism, "Hospitality is Iowa's "#1 image. We are viewed as a 'worry-free' destination," Nancy continued, as she and I sat and talked at the Iowa Department of Economic Development. "People feel safe wherever they travel in Iowa. If they were to see you on the street, they would feel comfortable asking you for directions and actually believe that you are telling them the correct route. You, as well as other Iowans, will look them in the eye, say hello, ask how they are, and you actually care. That's really where we exceed any other destination is in our hospitality—the warm and welcoming people that you meet when you travel in the state. Hospitality is our number one image strength and that gives us the foundation of the "Iowa You Make Me Smile" theme."¹³

The marketing of Iowans as hospitable is then passed on to the regional offices, of which Western Iowa Tourism is one. Hospitality is encouraged among the hill communities in several ways, most notably in "hospitality training"—one of the main components communities must comply with to become a "Loess Hills Community."

I asked Penny what "hospitality training" included. "We'll throw in the hospitality aspect and say 'these are the kinds of things that visitors make judgments about,'" she explained. "These are the kinds of things that visitors need in order to complete a positive experience. They need friendly people. They need people in town that can give directions.

With a smile. People in the museum need to be knowledgeable about the museum. They need to be friendly,” she repeated again.

The hospitality theme is also seen at the local level. It is the *Loess Hills Hospitality Association*, after all. The most popular Loess Hills Hospitality Association tour is the “Hospitality Tour.” Trace’s reason in Chapter 4 for choosing this name is “that’s what we do best in rural America.” That is, with the rural identity comes a rural personality of kindness. There is a stressing of the small community friendliness in the tours. Let us “welcome you with open arms and good ol’ Iowa hospitality” proclaims the letter sent to me from the Hospitality Association when I requested information. “Come and enjoy the hospitality of the local people in our small communities. We welcome you!” the Loess Hills calendar shouts.

“That’s what we do best in rural America,” implies it’s a “natural for us,” the former marketing director for the Hospitality Association told me. She clarified when I asked her what she meant by “natural.” “We’re friendly, down-to-earth people that take the time to visit and probably always invite you in for a cup of coffee and a snack and are real accommodating.”

A clear “rural is better than urban” slant is attached to this theme, with the emphasis on “local people” and “small communities.” In the 1999 *Iowa Travel Guide*, an advertisement for hotels in Iowa begins, “Iowa is a land so fertile, even our hospitality is homegrown.” Even the terms describing residents, “down-to-earth” and “natural” get back to the agrarian roots of those in the hills.

This “rural is better” inference is also taken on by the State in advertisements enticing those who have left to come back. In the Iowa State University Alumni Association publication, an ad with a sympathy card, containing a single rose on the cover with the caption “Our Heartfelt Sympathy” jumps out at the reader. Below the sympathy card is an intended rhyme,

When we heard you left us for crime, traffic and pollution,
We just had to offer you a better solution
So give up the big city frustrations
Come live here with us, free from irritations.¹⁴

“All of Iowa’s a small community,” it appears to be saying, and therefore all of Iowa has the positives of rural living. So when Iowa, and the hill’s #1 image strength appears to be waning, there are concerns. The Hospitality Association Board is aware of some of the problems caused by the ownership issues I discussed previously. At a Hospitality Association “Challenges and Goals Setting” meeting, “sense of competitiveness between Harrison and Monona Counties,” “divisiveness of counties,” and “personal agendas” were three such issues of concern to be discussed. An additional problem is the decrease in hospitality.

Various members of the Board talked about how things “used to be” when buses came through town. “Main Street Moorhead would go nuts,” exclaimed one. “People would be out in Mainstreet waving, Denny, the mayor of Pisgah would come out in his wheelchair, and greet everyone,” whimsically said another. “We don’t have that any more,” one member lamented, to which another replied, “No, not at all.” The excitement “is over with the bus tours, they are no longer unique, people don’t run out and say ‘hi’ and wave,” added a third. “We don’t have the product to sell any more,” a fourth stated. In this case, the product is friendly people. So it was suggested that to alleviate this problem “we need to do some hospitality training” (as will be done with the Loess Hills Communities). Gentle reminders to be nice.

Landscape architect Mira Engler writes about the transformation of Iowa “communities into comm-odities” as they strive for a unique angle to draw tourists.¹⁵ Attaching an ethnic theme (even if all in the town aren’t of that ethnicity), is one major way of “theming” a community. Individuals in the hills (and all of Iowa) are also themed. A personality of “we’re so gosh darn nice,” is attached to residents without their explicitly agreeing to it. As the Loess Hills are constituted, so is a subject of “nice people” in them. It is not the worse thing to be called. But it is an act of power, where the label is placed upon individuals, and all voices didn’t have a say.

“A blatant omission”

On April 30, 1998, my last day of living in the hills, I went up to Moorhead to say my

good-byes. Ginger was training a new volunteer in the Hospitality Association Gift Shop. I hung out with them and we talked, talk which turned to the national park idea, which was into it's six month (at that time) crusade. "Bill Leonard wants to know why we're not responding," Ginger told me. "But we don't know if we want a national park."

I note in Chapter 2 I, too, had been asked by Bill Leonard why there was "no one responding." Very few letters to the editor in favor of the idea come from individuals in the hills. Which raises the question. When a peopled landform is under discussion how much of a voice should the people in the landform have? At least as much a voice as anyone else. Yet this is not occurring and there are power and democratic implications, for this omission, and for misrepresentation of voices.

To get back to Bill's question, there are several reasons why residents are not responding. The first one is simple. Residents are not aware of the *Register's* role in the discourse, because very few residents read the *Des Moines Register*. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, those in Western Iowa never felt particularly close to the rest of Iowa, leaning more towards South Dakota and Nebraska. Those living in the western third of Iowa tend to read the *Omaha World Herald*, which carries a Western Iowa section. That's what I read while I lived in the hills, to get news on Western Iowa.

Those who do attempt to get the *Register* have difficulty doing so, for the "The Newspaper Iowa Depends On" refocused its efforts approximately 15 years ago and pulled out of Western Iowa. This was done due to the low population base there, and lack of advertiser support. "Typically the *Register* looks at the Golden Circle. That's where their population, their money, a lot of the action is," is the common response I hear regarding the paper.

I was told by the *Register* Customer Service, "we don't go there," when I gave my Castana address, in hopes of getting the paper delivered. If I got up early enough, I could run into Onawa or Mapleton to get one of the few *Sunday Register's* (the only day available for purchase). If Malinda "gets up town quick enough" in Moorhead, she can snag one. Tory has driven to Denison (an hour away) when he's particularly motivated. "Here they are, writing things about Western Iowa, but they don't provide the towns with the paper," said

one offended resident.

The *Register* is making continuous statements which are influencing the discourses constituting the Loess Hills. These statements are about a place of much emotional significance to those who live there. Yet the *Register* is not providing the people in the place access to this particular discourse.

In the course of my conversation with Mike and Carol, Mike had mentioned the park idea may be a good one, if “approached right.” I asked him what he meant. “Anytime you approach people with an idea, what you’re starting to do is sell a project. Most of these people haven’t even heard about it around here. If they’re serious about this, they’re gonna have to get the word out here instead of just in a Des Moines paper.”

“Very few people out here get The *Register*, you know,” Kirby remarked as we discussed the national park idea. “And that’s where a lot of the press has been. It’s been people from outside the area writin’ stuff about it. It hasn’t been inside the area that much. The Des Moines *Register* doesn’t deliver like they used to. They barely get it out to the cities out here.”

I asked Desiree if she had heard much reaction around Missouri Valley, one of the bigger towns in the area.

“No,” replied Desiree. “We’re in the Boonies as far as Des Moines’ concerned. In fact, it was people from Des Moines that told me about it.”

These conversations reminded me of the writer Dayton Duncan’s discussion on a proposal called “The Big Open.” A non-profit institution, “Institute of the Rockies, based in Missoula, a university town in western Montana, proposed that all of Garfield County [located in Eastern Montana] and the thinly settled portions of nine surrounding counties be turned into the Big Open Great Plains Wildlife Range.”¹⁶ The Big Open would “become an international destination, a magnet for tourists, sportsmen, photographers and outdoors enthusiasts.” The low population base and isolation of the region (*Miles from Nowhere*, as the book title implies) of Montana was the justification for this. While the author of the proposal felt there were only two things standing in the way, “a herd of 150,000 cows and calves and a herd of 150,000 sheep and lambs located on 250 ranches,” Duncan noted there

was a third obstacle. “The people themselves.”¹⁷

“As the plan for the Big Open had been devised,” Duncan writes, “no one had bothered to solicit native’s opinions about switching to a safari economy. Jordan [the major town located in the Big Open] learned about the proposal when someone sent a *New York Times* article about it to the president of the local Chamber of Commerce.”¹⁸

The parallels are striking. Both Garfield County and Western Iowa are places set apart from the rest of the world. Educated individuals from outside the places are suggesting ways for the place to be used, ways which would bring outsiders in. These “suggestions” however, do not include residents’ voices and opinions.

“We still regard all of Iowa as our home,” *Register* Editor Richard Doak told me when I inquired about the *Register’s* focus on central Iowa rather than the entire state. “But economically our market is in central Iowa. That’s where we sell the most papers. That’s where the people live who our advertisers want to reach. In that sense, we have concentrated on central Iowa. It became more costly to deliver it there [in western Iowa] than we got in return.

“So, how do you respond,” I continued, “when those living in [the area] aren’t aware of the discussion going on about the national park?”

“That’s fine,” is how Richard responded. “I think, again, this is a long-term thing. I think sooner or later it’s going to seep into the consciousness if we keep writing about it and if enough people locally and statewide start talking about it. I wouldn’t expect everybody in Iowa to instantly respond to a *Register* editorial campaign. It’s just not the way things work. But over 5-10 years, I’m hoping the level of consciousness about the hills and about their possibilities will become more and more part of the discussion, more taken for granted.”

It was the working class residents who seldom mentioned the park idea in my conversations with them. At the time of my living in the hills, most residents I talked with were not aware of the National Park proposal, and I did not bring it up in conversation unless they mentioned it first. “National Park” has too much baggage attached to it; “government,” “condemnation” and “development.” I also did not want to influence the discourse more than I was already doing.

Certain local leaders in the hills have been sought out by the *Register*. Yet they, too, are a bit put off by how the local level has been neglected with this top-down approach. These comments range from the more hostile, “that’s the *Register* again, just trying to stick this down people’s throats,” to being hurt and insulted. “To do that without checking with the local people is wrong. We’re not going to just give it up.”

Bill, who works closely with local landowners stated in the early days of the national park campaign, “I think to come out and make statements like the *Des Moines Register* has made, could be more detrimental than beneficial. I think they’ve got a good idea. But instead of talking to some of the local people, they disregarded us and started shooting off their mouth and I am a little offended by that.”

In a February 1998 editorial, and in my interview with Bill Leonard, he wrote and stated the three qualifications necessary for National Park status. “The criteria for determining what sort of an area deserves national-park status fit under three major headlines: Is the area unique? Is it attractive? Do the people want it?” Bill answers the first two questions, and then asks, “Do the people want it? Drop in on the Loess Hills Hospitality Association headquarters in Moorhead, or the Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development group in Oakland. Talk to the valley farmers who hope to see the surrounding hills survive them.”¹⁹

But there is a different perception in the region. “Who is he talking to?” Bob, who works frequently with the hill farmers stated after reading the editorial. “I want to know who these valley farmers are.”

And I asked at the Hospitality Association, as Leonard suggests. Ginger’s comments at the beginning of this section “We don’t know if we want a national park” puts it clearly. As do Malinda’s.

“Well, he [Bill Leonard] called me one day,” Malinda said, “and he wanted to know what the president of the Hospitality Association’s phone number was. And so then we visited and he was wantin’ to know what the local people thought about this national park. And I told him that most of ‘em didn’t have a clue including the board.”

Malinda continued. “Then I called [then president of the Hospitality Association] and

asked him what he [Bill Leonard] asked him. Nosy me!” she exclaimed. “I wasn’t even subtle! You don’t find out a lot of things sometimes bein’ subtle!” she advised me. “And anyway, Bill didn’t call him. So I think that probably Bill, from what I said, decided there wasn’t any point maybe.”

A letter sent in the summer of 1998 from the Hospitality Association Board to local leaders to discuss this issue also suggests otherwise. It shows the concern residents are having with those individuals not *from* the region, making proclamations *about* it. “It seems as though areas of the state of Iowa not located within the Loess Hills may be leading the way to the future and preservation of the Hills. Local citizens are concerned with this circumstance. The residents of the Loess Hills, in many instances, are not aware of the issues at hand concerning the preservation of the Hills nor the National Park promotion. Those who are aware are confused about National Park practices and are opposed, but are also confused as to what their choices are.” It also shows the concern the Hospitality Association has with another voice entering the discourse on promotion of the hills.

The *Register* is misrepresenting some residents’ voices, because it is *neglecting* residents’ voices. This example is a microcosm of what is occurring in the overall constituting of the Loess Hills. There is a “blatant omission,” stated an individual involved in landowner issues statewide, “of the residents’ voices.”

Sociologist Bruno Latour, who has done extensive research on the sociology of science, argues it is when “doing science” that “most new sources of power are generated.”²⁰ The scientists in the discourse have provided a base of knowledge from which power can be generated, thus showing their part in the web of power/knowledge. Yet it is groups with specific stakes other than the scientists who continue generating power from science. These individuals include the State, the Hospitality Association, and the *Des Moines Register*.

In Bill Leonard’s initial *Register* column on “Awakening to the possibilities” of the hills, he writes, “When folks around Moorhead and Pisgah and Turin and Onawa talk about the Loess Hills, they aren’t ‘the’ hills anymore. They’re ‘our’ hills.”²¹ He’s correct. But the “our” is taken much more literally by those with specific interests and stakes in the region. The “our” has been taken to the point where some voices are controlled, and/or

misrepresented, and democracy has been restricted.

IV

UNPACKING



SIX**ORANGE AVE., OR “JUST NORTH OF HICKORY NUTT”**

The farmhouse I rented was located on a gravel road, along the foothills of the Maple River Valley. The gravel road was called Orange Ave.—a name given to it by the 911 Committee in the County. Every county in Iowa was getting its streets re-named, in order to comply with the 911 system, and make it (supposedly) easier for emergency vehicles to locate individuals in need. All roads running north and south in Monona County now have a fruit attached to them—some you would never, ever find growing in the cool weather of Iowa.

One of my first days out “in the field,” I attempted to ride my bike to Moorhead. I took a wrong turn, and got lost, as do most “outsiders.” I ended up in Grant and Nan’s barnyard. I saw Grant, and, asking for directions on how to get where I was going, I told him where I came from. “I started out on Orange Ave.,” I began. “Orange Ave.???” Grant exclaimed. “I have no idea where that is. It’s hard for me to get used to these street names.” Grant, from whose family I was renting the house, didn’t know the external name given to the road. From that exchange, I quickly learned to locate myself with terms more familiar to the residents, with internally imposed language.

“Just north of Hickory Nutt,” my neighbor just south of me on the road, was much more successful when placing my home for residents. (Hazel Nutt lives there too, but when a name is attached to a place in the hills, it is a male name.)

“Oh sure,” would be the response, “Where Bill Hall used to live.”

“That’s the place,” I’d reply with a nod.

The seemingly simple process of naming is a powerful act.¹ As Foucault and other postmodernists argue, every act of categorization, of placing a label, is an act of power. Residents used power when they named this portion of the road, using “Hickory Nutt” or “Bill Hall” as place names. And a bureaucracy used power when they imposed another name, “Orange Ave.,” on the road.

Orange Ave. is indicative of the hills in several ways. Its externally imposed name is just one similarity. When I say “Orange Ave.” many of those who live on or near it wonder what I am talking about. But as a new generation of residents emerge in the hills, they’re not going to know where Hickory Nutt lives, or where Bill Hall used to. The working class names given to that stretch of the road will eventually be lost. The name that will be preserved is the one chosen by middle class bureaucrats. Orange Ave. will eventually become the place name used to identify the road, and an external frame of reference will become internalized.

The hills have also been given a name from outsiders. While “loess” wasn’t unknown to all who live in the area, it was definitely a term that lurked in the shadows until recently. And as a new road will be born, placed upon a road that already exists, so a “new” landform is being created, placed upon a landform that already exists.

Part of constituting a subject is claiming it for oneself. The implication from this is, if it’s mine, it’s not somebody else’s. I point out in Chapter 5 this is occurring at various levels. I do this as well. As I note in Chapter 2, when Grant first showed me the *Register*’s two-page spread on the national park idea my initial reaction was, “hey, they’re on *my* turf.” I really hoped Chuck Offenburger wasn’t going to devote a lot of his columns to the Loess Hills and the name change, which he discusses in Chapter 2, because that was “my idea” to begin with.

I too, am a middle class “outsider,” constituting the “Loess Hills.”² In the words of Gunnar Olson, reshaped a bit for my situation, my “theoretical reflections” on discourse are themselves constituting the Loess Hills.³ By my choosing to capitalize Loess Hills throughout, even though there were times I don’t think the individuals I was quoting meant it to be, I constitute the subject. I also constituted the subject when I indicate hill boundaries on maps. But this is the power of discourse; words have to be used, and structures have to be applied.

This power as a scientist doing ethnographic research is one reason for criticism of this (or any) type of research.⁴ “Problems of description,” write George Marcus and Michael Fisher, “become problems of representation.”⁵

But while I have come to be seen by some as the “expert” on the hills, how it is pronounced, where the boundaries are, what “catsteps” are, there was also resistance to me. I believe this resistance is due to my part of the power structure of science. My hill friend Peter told me of his buddy at the Castana Tap. “I told him about you and he’s always like, “Yes, I think I wanna be studied. My ex-brother-in-law, he was a economics professor at St. Louis University and he don’t know nothin’.”

“Do you think people feel like I’m here studying ‘em?” I asked.

“No,” said Peter, and then again, “No. Only from what I tell them. Of course, you kind of do,” he continued. “Of course, we study people too...” and drifted off and concluded, “what’s fair is fair.”

Peter isn’t the only one who suggested to others and to me I was “studying them.” I was often introduced as “This is Peg, she’s studying us,” or when I introduce myself, and what I’m up to, I commonly heard, “oh, so you’re studying us.” The frustrating part is, I can’t deny it. But I sincerely hope my studying and my criticism is of benefit and taken in the vein which I it is meant. I love the hills as well. And the strong emotional attachment for the hills and where I stand on issues regarding them no doubt affects what I have written.

It could be argued I, like some individuals and groups in Chapter 5 have omitted and misrepresented voices. There was concern by residents that I was only getting “one part of the story if she’s just looking at Monona County,” as Desiree told my colleague Clare Hinrichs. There was also concern the whole story be brought out in what I chose to write. “If you spend much time in the office in Moorhead, you’re getting one side of it,” I was told in reference to the “exclusion of Trace” story. My perceived closeness to the Hospitality Association was one reason for Penny’s earlier clarification on “who did” the Scenic Byway.

Eighty-six residents’ voices are heard in these pages. That’s not the majority of those who live in the hill region of Monona County. Nor is it “truly” representative in a statistical sense. I was concerned about this, and asked several local leaders who work with landowners for those who were “really isolated.” This is the group whose voices I am lacking. I discussed this with Gigi, trying to find a way to get these voices, and thinking she could help. As we talked on the phone, I expressed my concern that I was missing a group, that I

wouldn't be "representing their voices." Gigi and I both thought about this for a few seconds, and then said simultaneously, "Of course, maybe they don't want to be represented." I don't know. But as Ted said in Chapter 4, "a lot of people, especially in the hills, just want to be left alone." And I was not about to intrude for sake of a representative sample. So what I offer is partial knowledge, but knowledge I believe is valuable to the discourse of the "Loess Hills."

And to the discourse of sociology. The larger sociological point I want to make regards lack of democratic debate in the discourse that has constituted this "new" landform of the "Loess Hills." Residents' voices, especially working class residents, have not been heard. This is not an omission unique to this discourse. Working class voices are left out of many discourses. They lack the power needed to be heard and they lack the cultural capital to "talk the talk." Their voices are not sanctioned—not only in discussions constituting new places, but in all types of conversations. It is time to get these voices in all discourses.

How democracy issues are played out in creation of place is one of the conceptual souvenirs of the Loess Hills I leave in this case study. "Rethinking the Future of Democracy" is a challenge put to all sociologists by Larry Busch in his 1998 Presidential Address to the Rural Sociological Society. "We need to create new avenues of participation," Busch argues.⁶ The challenge to all of us is how to do this. Those in the Loess Hills are struggling with this issue, not always successfully. All of us struggle with these issues of democracy. Some of us, though, could give more commitment to the struggle.

The constitution of place has received little attention in the academic discourse among sociologists.⁷ The "spatial contexts" within which social relationships transpire is often "bracketed out" in sociological analysis.⁸ Clearly, there are strong emotions connected to the landform by those who reside, live, and work it. Study of the spatial context and how it impacts, and is impacted, is crucial to individuals' lives. Particularly significant in this work is the role of power, science, and the interplay of internal and external definitions in the social shaping of the hills. The creation of a place upon an already existing place, a creation constituted through discourse, is liable to be true in other places as well.

Finally, I also garnered some conceptual souvenirs about the power of names upon places, and the concept of power in general. Foucault argues, and I concur, that power “is not merely negative, repressive, and prohibiting, but positive and productive.”⁹ Yet power is often treated as such in our research. Power need not be the negatively laden term which we often assume. There are some negative implications from how power is used in the hills. But there are positive implications from the use of power in the landform as well.

As Naomi and I were finishing up our conversation and coffee, she showed me an envelope, which was stamped and ready to mail. “I try to use, they aren’t Loess Hills stamps but we think of them as Loess Hills stamps, the Iowa stamp [the stamp Iowa used for its sesquicentennial]. I try to use them on my correspondence. It’s Grant Wood, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” I replied, then asked her. “Now why do you like to use them?”

“There again, it’s pride. Something to be proud of,” Naomi replied.

“Is it pride in Iowa or because of the hills?” I wondered.

“It’s pride in Iowa and then it does kind of look like our area of Iowa. I even call it a Loess Hills stamp which I shouldn’t do that but...”

“He’s actually from right around Cedar Rapids,” I noted.

As I read the transcript I wondered why I said that. Why shouldn’t Naomi or anyone who wants to, be allowed to call it a Loess Hill stamp? I wanted to be informative, probably, and I am very proud Grant Wood is from nearby *my* home. But I also wanted to establish ownership and my own identity. This is not something just those residents in the hills are struggling with.

Our motorcoach tour was coming to a close. Even though the fall colors weren’t the brightest that year, the view was still wonderful, and the information garnered was of great interest. As we finished up our motorcoach tour Tory reminded us, “The Indians thought of these hills as sacred, something they didn’t claim as their own.” A tip for life’s sojourn I believe we could all learn from.

NOTES

Chapter 1 Notes

¹ While the placement of the boundaries is one of the sociological issues I discuss in-depth later, for descriptive purposes, here I will use the boundaries commonly used.

² Mutel (1989).

³ I will refer to the area under discussion as both “the hills” and the “Loess Hills” using the terms interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

⁴ Doak (1997:5A).

⁵ Resource Conservation and Development Agencies are funded by USDA, and administered through Natural Resource Conservation Service.

⁶ Zeleny and Norman (1999:1B).

⁷ Lobao (1996:78).

⁸ Tuan (1977:198).

⁹ Marsden et al. (1993:140).

¹⁰ Meyrowitz (1985:336).

¹¹ Rabinow (1984:252).

¹² Urry (1990:189).

¹³ Marsden et al. (1993:142-3).

¹⁴ Seidman (1994:215).

¹⁵ Foucault (1977:27).

¹⁶ Foucault (1969:59).

¹⁷ Taken from Iowa State University Sociology 607, Contemporary Theory Lecture.

¹⁸ Cloke et al. (1991:196).

¹⁹ Foucault (1980:77).

²⁰ Names of individuals are pseudonyms, except for those individuals where I first identify them with both a first and last name. The exception to this is Liz Valley. Those names not

changed include individual's whose printed word is either used in the text, or I make reference to their printed work. When quotes are given, I have cut out excess words. However, in cases where a change of name and/or change in quote occur, the context of the quote is not altered.

²¹ Prior (1991).

²² As noted in Prior (1991:48).

²³ Which I will at times denote simply as the "Hospitality Association."

²⁴ More commonly referred to and known as "the DNR," an acronym I will use.

²⁵ Agnew (1989:9).

Chapter 2 Notes

¹ I obviously must use some discretion on what individuals and activities I chose to identify as most prominent in drawing attention to the hills. I based this judgment using several qualifiers; (a) who the residents in the area identified, (b) who the primary players also identified as relevant (c) availability and willingness of respondents to be interviewed, and (d) time constraints. The depth of material and information on the Loess Hills is immense, but I am confident I have identified the major players and activities.

² Relph (1976:6).

³ The Iowa Department of Tourism underwent structural changes in 1988/1989, which explains why, in 1988, Trace dealt with a rural tourism representative which was not Penny. In 1989, the state was divided into three tourism regions, and the Western Iowa Tourism Region was established in Red Oak.

⁴ The Resource Enhancement and Protection program was created in 1990 by the Iowa Legislature. REAP is funded through taxes, lottery, sale of REAP license plates, and other revenue. It is most commonly referred to as REAP.

⁵ The term loess is pronounced several ways, an issue I expand upon in Chapter 4. When pronunciation is discussed in the text, I spell the term phonetically. "Loess" is "luss." Others pronounce the term in such a way phonetically it appears as "lo-ess." A third pronunciation is "lōse."

⁶ More commonly referred to (and which I will use) as "AEA."

⁷ While the activities mentioned by Jean are important to the discussion of the Loess Hills, I do not go in-depth on them here, primarily because these publications and groups were seldom mentioned, if at all by the residents of Monona and Harrison County. Other groups that are involved in work in the landform include Pheasants Forever and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. Currently, other than involvement in the Prairie Seminar and participation in a Iowa Legislative Public Forum held in September 1998, activities by the these groups are minimal (or recognized as minimal) in the area I studied.

⁸ Ambrose (1996:161).

⁹ For a much more detailed discussion on early scientific research on the hills, see Jean Prior's 1991 book, *Landforms of Iowa*.

¹⁰ Darwin Koenig is formerly of the Poweshiek County Conservation Board and now director of the O'Brien County Conservation Board in Northwest Iowa.

¹¹ The library at Iowa State University regularly ranks at about the 25th largest in the country; for the journal citations I used an on-line version of Social Science Abstracts and searched under the phrase "Loess Hills."

¹² As of January 12, 1999, total acreage is 9937.

¹³ Rubiner (1997:28D).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The former name for the Department of Natural Resources.

¹⁶ Offenburger (1997:1T).

¹⁷ Offenburger (1994:1B).

¹⁸ These include Ames, Des Moines, Spencer, Mason City, and Sioux City.

¹⁹ Thanks to Mark Chidister for providing this information.

Chapter 3 Notes

¹ Meinig (1979:33).

² “Human meaning” is taken from the insights of sociologist Andy Pickering in his commentary ‘Further Beyond the Society/Nature Divide: A Comment on Freudenburg, Frickel and Gramling.’ (1996).

³ Bourdieu (1989:18).

⁴ According to the US Census, in 1980, “Employed Persons” by agriculture in Monona County made up 29%. This dropped to 18% in 1990, but is still higher than the non-metro US which had 7% employed in the agricultural industry.

⁵ Relph (1976:6-7).

⁶ Schutz (1967).

⁷ Greider and Garkovich (1994).

⁸ Mutel (1989:90).

⁹ A funny thing happened while writing this sentence. As I typed out lifestory—well, it just happened again. What I meant to say (I think) is as I typed out lifestyle, I typed “lifestory” instead. I looked at it for a second, and thought, well, lifestory fits as well, but I better include lifestyle. As I typed lifestyle, it again came out lifestory, as it has 5 different times now when I mean to write (I think) lifestory—lifestyle. So the word “lifestory” remains.

¹⁰ I had not initially given this reply. But I learned through time in the hills it was the response that was almost immediately grasped by those who knew the area. “North of Hickory Nutt,” my neighbor who lived just south of me, was also immediately grasped by most. I elaborate on this “locating myself” in Chapter 6.

¹¹ Relph (1976:39).

¹² In a lecture given at Iowa State University to the Historic Preservation Association, May 28-June 1, 1997.

¹³ Clark (1956:23).

¹⁴ Bell (1998:47).

¹⁵ Preparation Canyon State Park, located approximately 3 miles from Moorhead, and 5 miles from Pisgah.

¹⁶ For example, the Iowa State University Bookstore (another tourist spot, particularly on game days) is selling the same type of afghan with various ISU symbols.

¹⁷ These symbols include the Harrison County Courthouse, Catsteps, replica of the Lewis and Clark Keel Boat located in Onawa, Norwegian County Church outside Soldier, Harrison County Museum, Dunham Barn near Dunlap, apple orchards, and the Danish Country Church near Moorhead.

¹⁸ Hiss (1990:xiii-xiv).

¹⁹ Sack (1997:135).

²⁰ Bell (1997:815).

²¹ These sixth graders from Castana, Mapleton and Danbury attend the Danbury Grade School.

²² Mormont (1987) and Bell (1994).

²³ Fitchen (1991:250-1).

²⁴ I was actually aware of this study before I moved out to the area, but was made more aware of it by some who live in the area.

²⁵ Lasley (1996:5).

²⁶ Salamon and Tomatore (1994).

²⁷ Median Household Income for Monona County in 1993 is estimated to be \$24, 572. This compares to the State Median Household Income of \$28, 867. Goudy et. al (1998:226).

²⁸ There are very few women in the age group of 20-40 years in the towns of Moorhead, Castana and Turin, an absence noted by several I talked with. One mid-30's farmer, after telling me he liked the area, told me there were a few things he liked to change about it, and immediately said there were "no women to date around here."

²⁹ *Random House Collegiate Dictionary* (1975:514).

³⁰ The video "A Place Apart," was produced by Dan Wishart, and part of the art exhibit.

³¹ Bell (1994:167).

³² "Land Between Two Rivers" documentary. Iowa Public Television, 1987.

³³ The confluence of the Little Sioux River Valley and Missouri River is one such place.

³⁴ Durkheim ([1912]1965:466.)

Chapter 4 Notes

¹ Nicolson (1959:17).

² Schroeder (1981:118).

³ Muted (1989:36).

⁴ I'm showing my urban mind here, as many residents call the noon meal "dinner" and the evening meal "lunch."

⁵ Granovetter (1973).

⁶ Granovetter (1985), Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993).

⁷ Bell (1997:885)

⁸ Putnam (1993:35). Other writers on community and public place include Edward Relph's *place and placelessness* (especially pages 33-36), and Tony Hiss, *The Experience of Place*, (especially pages 87-94). See also Robert Putnam (1996) and James Coleman (1998, 1990) for discussion on social capital. Other writers taking a more critical approach to social capital include Peggy Petzelka and Mike Bell (1998), Alejandro Portes (1998) and Michael Schulman and Cindy Anderson (1998).

⁹ Petzelka and Bell (1998).

¹⁰ The Moorhead Centennial is planned for the year 2000, even though a historical fact sheet on towns in the area says Moorhead was established in 1883. Several explanations have been given for how Moorhead was officially established in 1900 (when all the towns surrounding it were established approximately 20 years earlier). I sense this is done to justify the lateness of the centennial, and to coincide with the year 2000. The best justification I heard for the date was "it coincided with finally getting around to doing something about it."

¹¹ Taxes paid (or not paid) by the State depend upon how the land is purchased. Taxes are paid on land that's purchased with REAP money or Open Spaces (which is all of the forest ground). Taxes are not paid on land bought with federal funding, which includes the Loess Hills Wildlife Area.

¹² Probasco-Sowers (1999:10D).

¹³ Ageyman and Spooner (1997:119).

¹⁴ “Just roll with the hills” (1994:1AA).

¹⁵ Prior (1991:51).

¹⁶ Hansen (1999:2AA).

¹⁷ “No way to treat a treasure.” (1997:2AA).

¹⁸ “Just roll with the hills.” (1994:1AA).

¹⁹ Ritzer (1996:600).

²⁰ Sack (1997:135).

²¹ Lewis (1979:12).

²² The town mouse and the country mouse is an old story with several versions. Either the town mouse visits its cousin, the country mouse, or vice versa. The end is always the same. Things are better in the country, and the country mouse is no longer envious of the lifestyle of its town cousin. The story is of Greek origin, and adopted by Aesop.

²³ Williamson (1995:ix).

²⁴ Williamson (1995:16).

²⁵ Sachs (1983).

²⁶ I also believe this is changing because of the whole “pro-rural” sentiment which is occurring in the Midwest (and elsewhere in the US). Rural areas have now become fashionable to live in and seen as a way to escape urban problems. This is not seen so much in an Onawa to the hills migration, but an Omaha to the hills migration.

²⁷ 1990 population of Monona County was 10,034, making it the 19th smallest county (out of 99) in Iowa. Goudy et. al (1998).

²⁸ Norris (1993:148).

²⁹ There are four state parks in Western Iowa. Waubonsie in Fremont County; Preparation Canyon and Lewis and Clark, both in Monona County, and Stone Park in Plymouth County.

Chapter 5 Notes

¹ Askew (1993:4).

² Askew (1993:6).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Scott (199 :82).

⁵ For a detailed description of the tours, see Mutel 1989, particularly pages 205-262.

⁶ Sack (1986:19).

⁷ Sack (1986:20).

⁸ Thanks to Pete Korsching for initially pointing this out to me during discussion on my dissertation proposal.

⁹ Zeleny and Norman (1999:1B).

¹⁰ Lacoste (1993:1-2).

¹¹ As a reference point, Walnut and Elk Horn are each approximately 60 miles southeast of Moorhead.

¹² Norman (1999:3AA).

¹³ This has been the slogan since 1995 but under threat of attack with Governor Vilsack and due to be changed in 1999, with a contest being held for the best new slogan.

¹⁴ *Visions* (1999:37).

¹⁵ Engler (1993:8).

¹⁶ Duncan (1993:56).

¹⁷ Duncan (1993:57).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Just say yes." (1998:6AA).

²⁰ Latour (1983:160).

²¹ Leonard (1997:4AA).

Chapter 6 Notes

¹ Porteus (1990:24).

² It was made very clear to me I was an outsider. "I can tell you're a foreigner," Morey hollered cheerfully when I locked my car on main street Moorhead. "You lock your car." (I had my camera and tape recorder in there!). "You can tell you're not from here," Nan hollered from the car window as she waited for me and I walked down the back steps of my farmhouse. "No one out here locks their door."

³ Ollson (1980).

⁴ Critics of ethnographic research include Clough (1992), and Clifford and Marcus (1986).

⁵ Marcus and Fisher (1996:9).

⁶ Busch (1999:11).

⁷ Lobao (1996), Bell (1997).

⁸ Lobao (1996:80).

⁹ Lemert and Gillan (1982:59).

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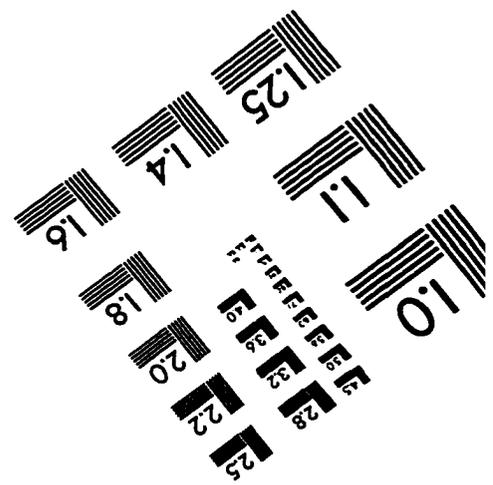
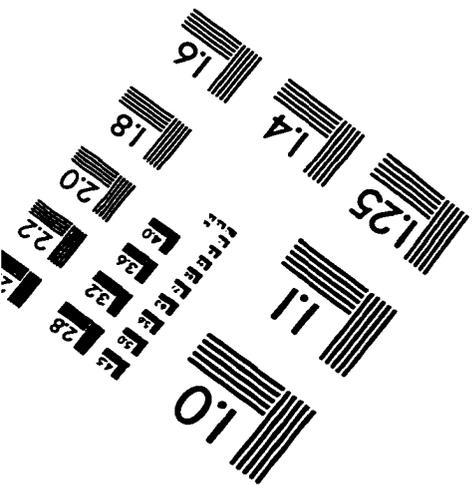
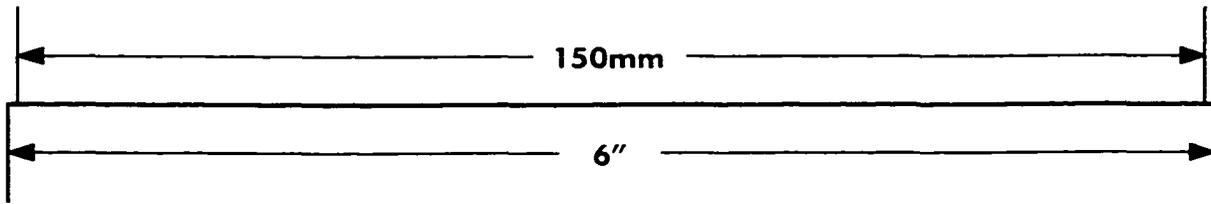
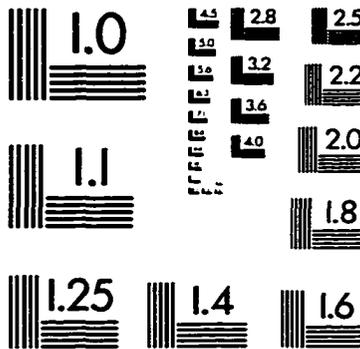
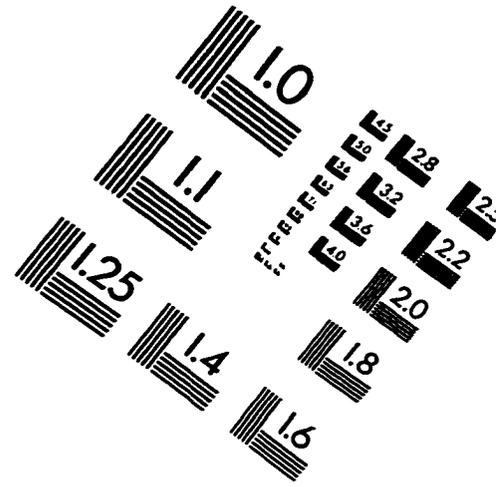
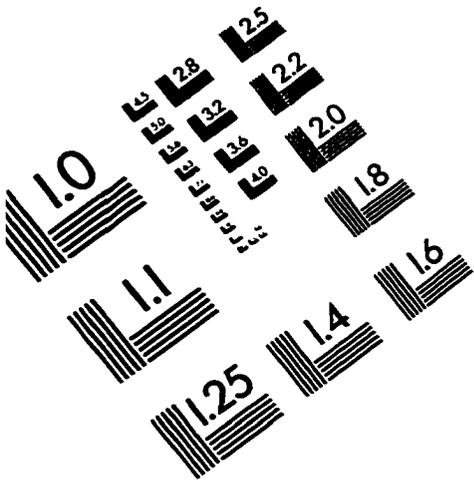
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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