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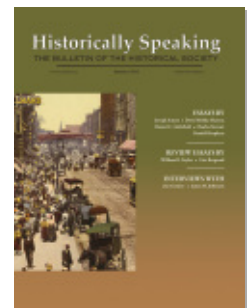
## The Extraordinary Ordinary and the Changing Face of Place

Joseph Amato

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Cover image: State Street north from Madison, Chicago, 1900. Detroit Photographic Co. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [reproduction number, LC-DIG-ppmsca-18098].

PLACE AND AMERICAN HISTORY

TO KNOW A PLACE IS NO SMALL THING. IN ILLUSTRATING THE HISTORY OF PLACE AND its embodiment of distinct and forgotten configurations of peoples, landscapes, politics, and economies, local history honors the works and sacrifices of the past, reminding us that each place and generation has a distinct hour in time.

With this issue, we begin a three-part series on "Place and American History." Our guide on this exploration of place is Joseph Amato, emeritus professor of history and dean of local and regional history at Southwest Minnesota State University and humanist advisor for the Society for the Study of Local and Regional History. Amato has been an evangelist for the practice of local history and has written a number of influential books that link the local and specific to larger social and political themes, including *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History* (University of California Press, 2002) and *Jacob's Well: A Case for Rethinking Family History* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2008). He is also author of *Dust: A History of the Small and Invisible* (University of California Press, 2000); *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York University Press, 2004); and *Surfaces: A History* (forthcoming from the University of California Press).

The series is supported by a grant from the Earhart Foundation.

THE EXTRAORDINARY ORDINARY AND THE CHANGING FACE OF PLACE

Joseph Amato

Although never entirely static and fixed, traditional places are shaped by recurrent seasons and structured by age-long customs, practices, and beliefs. They host the regular, the normal, the repeated, and the local—what we call the ordinary and everyday. They occupy an abiding spot in society, given their capacity to ignore and disregard—as well as modify, assimilate, and absorb—the new things and ideas that come their way from the outside world. Though not exempt from the ravages of famine, plague, changing markets, warring armies, and intermittent government representatives, these places (I think especially of the rural villages of Europe) have been defined since the Middle Ages as the antithesis of the changing worlds of court and city, the vacillating designs of power and commerce, and the alteration of sensibilities and whims of styles. Repositories of primal social relations and ancient cultures, local places are where hearths warm and cradles swing.

We can't discount the many testimonies that valley, village, and family—the old way—cruelly imprison and oppress individuals and justify flight from them. But local places, especially through the prism of the past two centuries or so of movement and transformation, are cherished under the guise of stable and intimate home. Home and village cradle youth, educate and train it in the ways of others and the making of things, and give it emotional substance and a basic compass for the greater world. Twentieth-century Welsh poet Glyn Jones gets at how flesh incarnate finds its first niche in life in home and place. He writes in "Goodbye, What Were You?"

At the voice of the mother on a warm hearth,

Dark and firelit, where the hobbled kettle crinkled  
In the creak and shudder of the rained-on windows,  
This world had its beginning  
And was here redeemed.

All in that kitchen's warmth, that mother's glow,  
Was blessed, nothing was abandoned.  
There God's boy was born, loving, by lantern lights,  
His church built of the breathing of cattle;  
Before nightfall all lost in prowling woods were home.<sup>1</sup>

As countless biographies attest, place, which so often connotes hearth, village, and valley in the countryside or home and neighborhood in the city, supplies individuals, however far they wander, with a distinguishing spirit and a sense of home as the gift of first grace. These first places—let us call them our neighborhood, village, Main Street, or place in the valley—form the characters and events of stories, the themes and dramas of our lives, and, especially for local historians, the beginning and ends of our narratives.<sup>2</sup>

But traditional places have been, or are being, superseded nearly everywhere. At ever-accelerating rates across the course of modern history, especially in the past two centuries, older places (villages, valleys, regions, towns, and even city centers and neighborhoods) have vanished or relinquished much of their economic, cultural, and political autonomy. They have surrendered to and, in many places, even rushed to join the advance of markets; the spread of transportation and literacy; and the promise of a

fuller, softer life. Places have become subservient, interdependent, mutable, and provisional. In modern times—say, starting in the late 18th century with the commercial agricultural and industrial revolutions—geometrically expanding populations, waves of immigration, and new economic enterprises have brought into existence the social orders of frontier towns, outpost service centers, immense metropolitan cities, and expanding suburbs. Traditional places have subsided in number and importance. Standing in the shadow of new urban orders and central governments—I think not just of Europe and North America but China, India, the oil-rich Near East, and the emergent urban Latin America—traditional places persist primarily in the guise of Potemkin settlements for tourists to visit.

Localities, in sum, have literally lost their autonomy. The distinction and variety the past lent them have been surrendered to the differentiation and heterogeneity of modernity. Power and money; trains, roads, and airplanes; and communications have redrawn the borders of place, as have travel and migration. Across the past two centuries—first in the industrially developing and demographically growing West and now across much of the globe—traditional places have been swamped by political, economic, social, technological, and cultural influences that they could not repeal, digest, or tame. Myriad and protean agents of change have shown up on the streets, organizing political parties, propagating laws and rules, administering schools, drafting the young, and enrolling enthusiasms in new goods, ways, and dreams of distant opportunities. Economic, social, cultural, and political transformations came with the train, the information stream of the tapping telegraph, the turn of the radio dial, the click of the television remote, and the hands on the face of the ever-present and official clock, which announces the standardized work day. Clothes, manners, and books have brought fads, fashions, sensibilities, and affectations from far afield into village and neighborhood. New opinions, images, and icons have entered the hearts of persons without knocking. The world of could-be has triggered fresh passions and ambitions and produced slavish conformities.

In recent centuries human experience has largely abandoned village and valley. This gives resonating truth to early 20th-century Italian historian Benedetto's Croce's proposition that "all

history is contemporary history." Accordingly, the past of places must forthwith be rewritten in light of the multifold and universal revolution of modernity, which is defined by unprecedented transformations in all realms of human experience. This has made the condition of the ordinary, which rests on the relative stability and repetition of life, extraordinarily uncommon and justifies a reexamination of the purpose, value,



Shoppers on Sixth Avenue, New York City, 1903. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [reproduction number, LC-D4-9145].

and forms of local history.

Localities are as rich in meanings as they are problematic to write about. This is true not just because of the protean and pervasive changes in our times but because of the asymmetry between local history and contemporary professional history. As the former is based, though far from exclusively, on a wide familiarity with particular subjects and specific sources—their diversity, eccentricity, and particularity—so the latter is characterized by specializations of field, the use of social science generalizations, and ideological discourse. Though vast and heterogeneous by field, methodology, and subject, academic historical discourse contradicts the first disposition and premises of local history.

Place is inseparably married to home. It is where self first lives, imagines, dreams, and remembers. It births first senses, concepts, myths, and metaphors. And this parent of childhood and youth offers the old—perhaps, especially the old—pools of memories. Local history serves the need to know that all-important world, that which was first given. According to turn-of-the-century French Catholic writer Charles Péguy, for each in their mortality, there is only “a cradle, a family, a people, a time, a date, an entire temporal order,

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of unique and irreplaceable importance.”<sup>3</sup> Even after nostalgia has been perfunctorily dismissed by the critical mind as naive and little more than a literary construct of a sentiment, it stands a full and mature matter for the human heart. Arguably, it remains to the majority of all times and ages more compelling than the present’s conjuring and hopes of progress.<sup>4</sup>

Local history also meets the duty of the living to honor the dead, even though one large unit of the dead, veterans, has been buried and memorialized as belonging to the nation at large. In the service of remembrance, local history stands as one way to preserve and keep present the significance of past peoples, places, and lives. Local history can be adopted to serve the romantic and conservative agenda of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In accord with the political prescriptions of Burke and the historicism of Herder, local history matches an agenda of uniqueness, variety, and traditions and supplements a counteroffensive against the secular and revolutionary worldview of the Enlightenment.

Such motivations and justifications do not obviate, however, multiple impediments to the vitality and relevance of local history. Local history’s audiences diminish, to use a rough measure, proportionately to the shrinking size and influence of the countryside and urban neighborhoods. Local history is written, though not universally, by amateur, nonacademic historians whose limits and deficiencies of historical understanding and craft form a long, if not disqualifying, list of shortcomings, including eccentricity, provincialism, and an absence of critical methodology. Amateurs in great majority don’t share the professional historian’s commitment to structured narratives and investigations of causality. Their first fidelity is to the details and anecdotes of specific places, definite circumstances, and particular happenings.

This emphasis on the unique and singular (which squares with the romantic agenda) can make even good-quality local historians indifferent to the structures of larger forces and to larger narratives of epochs and nations. Their commitment to a fixed place and past can lead them to ignore the revolutions and revelations that cause critical historians to rethink yesterday.

Indeed, local historians’ hearts can belong to their museums. Things evoke the past. A 19th-century Western creation becomes a tedious 20th-century habit.<sup>5</sup> At their common worst, museums end up full of inert artifacts and redundant collections that repeat, with objects, stereotypes; swallow up the vitality of historical associations; and encapsulate local historians’ imaginations. Though individual museums can be, as is the case here in the Midwest, unquestionably rich in technological artifacts and the fruits of ethnic communities, many amass in nearly identical measure coins, arrowheads, sheets of music, instruments, seed signs, uniforms from all branches of the service, and hats sufficient for a dozen Easter parades. Crammed basements

and stuffed attics materially document that mass-produced goods and national causes, with widely shared images and icons, do not strike fresh thought anymore than innumerable replicas of sod houses and one-room schools and signs of the coming of the railroad, the good times of the 1920s, the dust of the 1930s, and the nation going to war in the 1940s invite new perspectives.

Such standard depictions duplicate widespread

## In the service of remembrance, local history stands as one way to preserve and keep present the significance of past peoples, places, and lives.

official commemorations of the past, and they leave more subtle forces and expressions of reality unexplored. Local historians do not commonly take into account, for instance, such manifest topics as local building materials, the geography and construction of roads and others structures, and environmental changes related to soil, water, air, and ecology. They leave unexamined mechanisms used for the propagation of national ideologies and the perpetuation of established cultures. They disregard such subtle matters as the role and alteration of emotions, sensations, sensibilities, and thought. They neglect local gathering, hunting, and fishing cultures. And although they might for the sake of local color take up notorious moonshiners, bootleggers, whiskey runners, and itinerant gangsters, they leave aside investigations into clandestine types—local gamblers, pornographers, pedophiles, prostitutes, abortionists, and members of strange sects and practitioners of occult magic. Likewise, often overlooked are those “music men” who passed through their proverbial River City as itinerant salesmen, scam artists, necessary seasonal laborers in the field, and performers in the annual summer carnival and circus.

There are undeniable benefits in writing the history of a place. Working on the microcosmos, one discovers the power of locality in defining home, self, and first communities. At least, that was the case for me when I took to writing the history of a microregion near the northern tip of the tall grass prairie, where waters run north to Hudson Bay, west and south to the Missouri River, and down off the Coteau des Prairies east to the Minnesota River and south through Iowa to join the Mississippi. There, in a rural place so far from my own home, I came to realize that I belonged body and soul to the east side of urban Detroit in the 1940s and 1950s and to a neighborhood of Germans, Slavs, Canadians, Italians, and others. Our small but neat brick homes, with single-car garages at the back along gravel alleys, were built in the 1920s and laid out on grids of highbrow English names—Evanston, Courville, Balfour, Devonshire, and so on. Every home held a distinct family, and

every shop, classroom, church, and park was a separate universe. The bus regularly ran downtown, where my father worked at Western Union’s main office, my mother shopped at Hudson’s, and I occasionally went to Detroit Tigers’ games at Briggs Stadium. As Detroit in every sense was home to myself and my family and friends, so distinct places—Odysseus’s Attica, Washington’s home on a tobacco plantation on Pope’s Creek, or Lincoln’s log cabin in Knob Creek, Kentucky—are the true and humble sources of all biographies and memoirs.

Only by becoming a local historian did I come to realize the informative powers of place. In addition to genealogy and stories, family history depends on a history of localities and a family’s—even a whole neighborhood’s—migration from one job or piece of land to another. I traced my multiethnic family from its places of origin across Europe to different sets of immigrations and migrations across North America, reaching from 17th-century French Acadia to 19th-century rural New England to mill-town Wisconsin to 20th-century Detroit. In this way I came to know self and family as equally rooted in places and routes of migration.

People of every place and time deserve a history. Local history has the potential to reconstruct our ancestors’ everyday lives—the machines and tools with which they worked, the goods and objects among which they lived, and the faces and groups in which they were raised and matured, had ambitions, and lived out distinct fates. Local history, in adroit hands, recaptures how peoples of a place and time experienced the world. It reconstructs what they thought, how they felt, and what formed their passions and follies; what they prayed for; and how they died and were buried.

In the course of the past 150 years or more, Western civilization—from its core to the most distant outposts—has been measured, to speak as a generalizing historian, by multiplying desires, consumption and production, laws, and government agencies. Traditions are superseded; crafts are extinguished; manners are set aside; and locales and neighborhoods are replaced by suburban sprawl. As charted by so much good literature and history, peasants and villages—respectively, the dominant form of human life since the agricultural revolution of 12,000-10,000 years ago—have been recently commercialized, nationalized, diminished, abandoned, and forgotten. This loss entails the loss of self, place, and tradition.

Historian Constance McLaughlin Green gets at some of this loss and cost. He writes that “for any true understanding of American cultural development, the writing and study of American local history is of primary importance. . . . [There one finds] our varied population stocks and their sharply differentiated cultural inheritances, the widely differing environments and the rapidity of changes in our economic life.”<sup>6</sup> American cultural critic and enemy of mass cities Lewis Mumford echoes

Green:

Every old part of the country is filled with memorials of our past; tombstones and cottages and churches, names and legends, old roads and trails and abandoned mines, as well as the things we built and used yesterday. All these memorials bring us closer to the past, and, so doing, bring us closer to the present; for we are living history as well as recording it; and our memories are as necessary as our anticipations.<sup>7</sup>

But the renovation of local history will depend upon standing home on its head. It may revisit locality (as more than one local and regional author has) and discover that the heterogeneity of places past equals or even exceeds what governments, agencies, and ideologies have deemed the cultural diversity of the present. Local historians must draw fresh inspiration from professional history, especially from the emerging fields of environmental and material history, whose insights contribute grounds for considerations of all places, rural and urban.<sup>8</sup> They must also turn to recent innovative works in cultural history that suggest novel themes and approaches to historical composition.<sup>9</sup> Above all, local historians cannot blind themselves to the recent transformations of environments, landscapes, societies, institutions, and minds.

As vigilant as local historians must be in not sacrificing their homes to stifling generalizations and official ideologies, they must recognize that localities begin as part of and are progressively incorporated into regions. Since their beginnings in the United States, rural and urban places, as economic geographers remind us, have been interconnected with the surrounding world. These interconnections are the consequences of the increased penetration of commerce, capital, and labor; the monumental expansion of transportation and communication systems; the heightened integration of government, law, and bureaucracy; and the spread and imposition of literacy, schools, drafts, and popular and political cultures. With so much constantly and progressively altering the relation of the local to the national and the provincial to the cosmopolitan, local historians are required to master the accordion-like notion of region and its subsets—zones, belts, and sectors—in order to establish contexts for the interconnected life of modern times.

In my own work I often treat my current hometown of Marshall—a lead town and regional

center of 10,000 with a university—as a part of southwest Minnesota, which itself shares a common history by virtue of being in the corner of a state and being an agricultural zone at the northwestern lobe of the tall grass prairie. Depending on the context of my study, I additionally think of it as a region on the northern prairie or yet part of the prairie lakes region. I place it at the northwestern corner of the Midwest, a borderland between

faiths. The Atlantic community settled the New World. The people of northern France—especially Normandy and Brittany—settled the St. Lawrence River valley, traveled the rivers of the Midwest and northern prairie, and explored the Minnesota river system. Names like Coteau des Prairies and Lac Qui Parle testify to the early presence of French explorers and traders here in southwest Minnesota.

Historians can base their use of regions on the work of anthropologists, who traditionally equate region to the space of tribes and peoples.<sup>11</sup> Linguists use similarities and differences in language to mark out regions, whereas demographers characterize regions by types and numbers of people. As geographers most commonly rely on spatial boundaries to describe a region's topography, resources, and economic development, so historians conceive of regions in terms of political and cultural borders.

The history of European names suggests that in the Middle Ages a particular feature of a landscape—a stream, a marsh, or a single tree—afforded place-names. In contrast, testifying to the tremendous transformative powers of contemporary civilization, whole regions are now identified by the nation that colonized them. A place never equally belongs, so to speak, to the lay of the land and the course of events.

Topography, soils, and climate play a special role in setting limits and determining forms of human settlements. For instance, according to essayist and naturalist Joseph Wood Krutch, the American West begins where vegetation competes for water rather than sunlight.<sup>12</sup> Yet the West as a region cannot be understood apart from ongoing economic and political efforts to place the land and its waters in the human hands of want and need. Harmony and disharmony of man and nature afford regions their lives and fates. Maps, with altered and unnaturally symmetric borders, record the jarring encounter of Old and New World conceptions of society and nature.<sup>13</sup>

In the hands of its definers, a region can be micro- or macrocosmically defined. Those with environmental commitments may conflate a region's distinct ecology with the fate of its first people (the keeper of its game, so to speak) or one of its physical attributes, such as a chain of mountains or a body of water.<sup>14</sup> Historians of the West like Donald Worster, Richard White, and Patricia Nelson Limerick create vast, moral narratives of entire macroregions, of nation building, the expansion of democracy, and the establishment of new economic and industrial orders. Their histories aspire to reflect critically on human conceptions and transfor-



Monroe Avenue, Detroit. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [reproduction number, HABS MICH,82-DETRO,58--4].

prairie and plain, wet and dry lands, a gateway to the Great Plains.

Yet as a region comprising twenty counties, roughly 10,000 square miles, and only a mere three towns of approximately 10,000 inhabitants, southwest Minnesota is too large to be a locality, especially insofar as a locale implies a concrete place that one knows directly. Furthermore, the region's geography, ecology, towns, and ethnic settlements are not, as is the case of most regions its size, homogeneous. Its varied and inconsistent economic, political, and cultural developments elicit multiple historical interpretations.

In Europe the concept of *region* predates *nation* by hundreds of years. As medieval Europe witnessed the birth of regions, it and following ages experienced their drastic change.<sup>10</sup> Regions took form as a consequence of being situated in distinct environments of mountains, woods, rivers, plains, and lowlands. They were equally shaped by climate, vegetation, and oceans and were defined by the birth and formation of agriculture, forestry, and mining. Culture, religion, economics, and sovereignties also gave regions intersecting and capricious borders. In early modern European history, regions existed by virtue of membership in Mediterranean or Atlantic economies or Catholic or Protestant

mations of nature and society.<sup>15</sup>

In charting such grandiose movements of the heavens, however, individual stars and planets can be lost. Localities and microregions can exist only as reflections of a greater universe. Local historians do not, though, follow suit. They can make a region the context and backdrop for the conditions, actions, and stories of a selected place. Microregions can provide a kind of mediating identity among a collection of places and localities that are in contact and share a common experience without denying their subservience to the orbit of an expanding metropolis, the fate of a nation, or even the altered course of the world.

Indeed, the need to define a place as distinct intensifies in direct relation to the degree it is subsumed to the growth of an impinging nation; mass, abstract, and specialized society; global and technical capitalism; and encompassing ideologies and mass culture.<sup>16</sup> Regionalism has had a growing resurgence in Europe, despite the continent's move toward integration. Microregionalism not only criticizes the excesses of centralization and taxation but also validates places and localities as having a worth and reality in themselves—and often a unique appeal to tourism, a source of economic and political power.

Wise local historians will grasp this, and more. They will not sacrifice locality to region and nation or yet nation and region to place. In fact, the resulting conceptual complexity need not benumb them but should lead them to timely and even strategic reformulations of home and place in the changing contemporary world. But their humble task must first be to get right the names, places, deeds, motives, associations, circumstances, and events of their chosen locale. This is imperative for rethinking home.

Not incidental to the local historian's own energy is the reward he or she receives from local history. It cannot only impart its practitioners with regional recognition but also make local historians an important voice of a place. And what they win for themselves they gain to a degree for their respective institutions—be it a local history association, institution, or educational establishment.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, local history can find a pedagogic use in the teaching of history, rural studies, geography, environmental studies, and even literature. Students' own local queries and research can be transformed into publications and conference presentations and become crucial to their education.

Although they follow a less cosmopolitan and stylish path than academic historians, local histori-

ans receive the additionally great reward of knowing that a contribution to a place is singular and irreplaceable. With their reputation grafted to a place, they have some consolation in knowing that their efforts will usually outlast popular nonfiction and standard academic tomes, which run the cruel and



Ben Shahn, *Main Street, Lancaster, Ohio*, 1938. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [reproduction number, LC-USF3301-006390-M1].

fickle gauntlet of the hour's fashion. Local historians do what master French local historian Guy Thuillier considers so important: they define the tissue and the memory of endangered local communities of all sorts.<sup>18</sup> And this is a powerful antidote to mass, global society.

As Main Street in much of America goes from antique shops to thrift and second-hand stores to abandoned buildings to teardowns, local historians ingest the ravages of time. Time dries up old fishing holes, empties dance halls and roller rinks, and muffles the sounds of machines. Local places vanish all the more quickly in the city, even in the first-ring suburbs. Increasingly, local historians mediate on temporality and mortality, and their passion to remember, preserve, and revive swims upstream against change.

Their melancholic reflections focus on the impermanence of place and transitory being. All this calls attention to the fragile self and vanishing memory. They may read their own work as merely transitory, provisional, and superficial, forever to be copyedited by events and never meriting even a revised edition. As Paul Valéry remarked, Elam, Nineveh, and Babylon—whole and entire civilizations—fell into oblivion and remain but dry stones and “beautiful vague names.”<sup>19</sup> And there comes a day when even the memories of Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Washington, London, Paris, Rome, Moscow, Beijing, and Tokyo will pale in the bright light of the present.

These thoughts do not divest local historians

of their fidelity, however. Temporality only anneals their passion to preserve the past. Historians of place persist in their pursuit of the past while knowing full well that only God promises immortality. Local historians strive to keep alive what contemporary civilization plows under. Home finally sets the compass of their craft. The richness of the past guides their enterprise.

A dozen summers ago, after canoeing a 120-mile stretch of the Missouri River, I visited Fort Benson, Montana, where a local journalist, Joel Overholser, transformed his enthusiasm for place into an independent research center aimed at understanding a unique town that stood as a gateway for an expanding nation.<sup>20</sup> A few weeks later, while visiting the Atlantic coast, I read naturalist Jennifer Ackerman's *Notes from the Shore*. Her book provides a rich guide to Delaware's Cape Henlopen and Cape Lewes and their dunes and beaches. She writes that there, in a mere handful of sand, “there is a riot of life.”<sup>21</sup> And this

can cheer the heart of any local historian, for it suggests that there is an infinity in the small and human—in a stand of trees in the valley, on a village square, around a hearth, at a dining room table, and along the lines and creases of a worn face.

Epiphanies abound—as does the truth that all history is local. Every place, however dramatically transformed, provides a map to the universes of self and world. Home remains the place in space and time where we meet our own making, and at the rim of this well, we learn to know fellow humans and their ways and take measure of the world at large in this age of great mutation, transformation, and metamorphosis. Place provides an anvil for hammering out a conversation about contemporary life. It offers an empirical integrity, anecdotal individuality, and temporal singularity not found in much specialized academic and professional ideological discourse. Indeed, one hundred good historians committed to one hundred local subjects would equal a renaissance of variety, and this renaissance would trump government-trumpeted diversity. Any rethinking of home acknowledges the grace and testifies to the affection and memory of a person's first and special place, where in the reverent words of Welsh poet Glyn Jones, “This world had its beginning / And was here redeemed.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Glyn Jones, “Goodbye, What Were You?” *Poetry, 1900-2000* (Library of Wales, 2007), 81. A prose counterpart to Jones's poetry is his *The Valley, The City, The Village* (Parthian, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Among the multiple sources of my thought on this subject are my reading in French, Sicilian, and Midwestern American history, and my reading of historians Eugen Weber and Guy Thuillier. Among my writings that directly and indirectly inform this essay are *Rethinking Home: A Case for Local History* (University of California Press, 2002) and with eds. Richard Davies and David Pichaske, *A Place Called Home* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003). In addition to numerous publications by Crossings Press (Marshall, MN) and the Society for the Study of Local and Regional History (Marshall, MN), one will find these three essays anticipated by numerous reviews for the *Journal of Social History*, essays and interviews here in *Historically Speaking*, and an unpublished manuscript on “place” under the editorship of Wilfred McClay and Ted McAllister.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Péguy, “A nos amis, a nos abonnés,” in *Oeuvres poétiques complètes* (Editions Gallimard, 1957), 48–49.

<sup>4</sup> For an introduction to thinking about nostalgia, see Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (Free Press, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> For two useful books on 19th-century museums, see Jonah Siegel, ed., *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources* (Oxford University Press, 2008) and Christ Gosden and Frances Larson, with Alison Petch, *Knowing Things: Exploring the Collections at the Pitt River Museum, 1884–1945* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Constance McLaughlin Green, “The Value of Local History,” in Carol Kammen, ed., *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice* (American Association for State and Local History, 1996), 90–91.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis Mumford, “Value of Local History,” in Kammen, ed., *Pursuit of Local History*, 88.

<sup>8</sup> For a useful introduction to environmental history, see Dan

Flores, “Place: An Argument for Bioregional History,” *Environmental History Review* 18 (Winter 1994): 1–18.

<sup>9</sup> For a single example, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (John Hopkins University Press, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> Forgotten, secret, abandoned, and invisible places inevitably occupy the local historian. For a work dedicated to “those whom historians tend to forget,” see Norman Davies, *Vanished Kingdoms: The Rise and Fall of States and Nations* (Viking, 2011), which treats much of Europe’s from the perspective of forgotten people, places, and events.

<sup>11</sup> For recent anthropological definitions of region, see Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (University of California Press, 1982); John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Westview Press, 1992); and Richard Fardon, ed., *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic Writing* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Wood Krutch, “New England and the Desert,” in *The Best Nature Writings of Joseph Wood Krutch* (William Morrow, 1969), 93.

<sup>13</sup> Jeremy Black, *Maps and History: Constructing Images of the Past* (Yale University Press, 1997), Dava Sobel, *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (Penguin, 1995), and Anne Marie Claire Godlewski, *Geography Unbound: French Geographic Science from Cassini to Humboldt* (University of Chicago Press, 1999) are three recent testimonies to the notion that places are discovered, imagined, invented, and contrived by mapmakers as well as historians.

<sup>14</sup> One ecological work based on a distinct aspect of a region is Dan Flores, *Caprock Canyonlands: Journeys into the Heart of the Southern Plains* (University of Texas Press, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Daniel Worster, *Under Western Skies: Nature*

and *History in the American West* (Oxford University Press, 1992), and Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (Norton, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> In his essay “Reading the Landscape,” prominent geographer D.W. Meinig shows the importance of place in the thought of the two founders of landscape studies, British thinker W. G. Hoskins and American thinker and founder of the journal *Landscape* J. B. Jackson, in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 195–244.

<sup>17</sup> I experienced this with the formation of our university’s Rural and Regional Study Center—which in its heyday brought together three faculty members, an environmental educator, a journalist, a handful of graduate students, a rural and regional studies curriculum, a history center, a geographic information studies laboratory, a small press publisher, and an independent local and regional history society.

<sup>18</sup> Guy Thuillier and Jean Tulard, *Histoire locale et régionale* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 119.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Valéry, “The Crisis of the Mind,” in *The Outlook for Intelligence*, ed. Jackson Mathews and trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews (Harper & Row, 1962), 23.

<sup>20</sup> See Joel Overholser, *Fort Benton: World’s Innermost Port* (River and Plains Society, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Ackerman, *Notes from the Shore* (Penguin Books, 1995), 72.

<sup>22</sup> Jones, “Goodbye, What Were You?” 81.

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