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Making of the American Landscape 469
Professor William Cronon
November 21, 2016

Dispersed Landscapes of Community in the Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood

My grandmother, Elaine Rattunde, lived in the house at 1243 East Dayton Street in Madison from when she was born in 1926 until she was married in 1950. After her husband passed away from leukemia, Elaine returned to live at 1243 East Dayton in 1959 and raised her four children with the help of her mother. She continues to live in that house today. She has experienced changes in the neighborhood over a span of ninety years, and my visits to her home and conversations with her have been instrumental in the formation of this essay. Below, I will examine changes in the landscapes and interpersonal interactions within the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood. Compared to the early 1900s, the landscape of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood has become less conducive to building community, and social networks have become disentangled from the land. The communities that residents associate with today have weaker ties to the landscape of the neighborhood and stronger connections to other locations. As automobiles replaced streetcars, transportation became more individualized rather than communal. Changes in occupation and leisure time have also contributed to the shift in community formation.

During the first part of the 20th century, most residents of the east side of Madison were industrial workers. The social and economic separation between the University-dominated west side and the industry-driven east side was so great that a city planning document stated that they

could be treated as two separate cities.¹ The factories of Fuller and Johnson Manufacturing Co., Gisholt Machine Co., and Northern Electrical Manufacturing Co. stimulated the expansion of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood, which grew far faster than Madison's average.^{2,3} More than six hundred workers on Madison's east side were employed in these factories at the start of the 20th century.⁴ In fact, the Gisholt Machine Co. was Madison's largest employer by 1912.⁵ Because so many residents of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood worked in these factories, there were abundant opportunities to form connections with neighbors. It is easy to form communities of people with similar socioeconomic status who have some of the same lived experiences. When work is difficult, talking with others who are experiencing the same thing is a great way to build solidarity.

Workplace connections still occur today, but in the early 1900s, residents of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood who established workplace connections also interacted around the neighborhood, such as at the small grocery stores or on their commute to work. Today, residents of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood are employed in diverse locations across Madison and even beyond the city limits in a wide variety of occupations.⁶ This contributed to the shift from communities based on the neighborhood landscape to those grounded in places of employment outside of Tenney-Lapham.

¹ Ladislav Segoe, *Comprehensive Plan of Madison, Wisconsin and Environs*. Volume 1. 1938.

² David V. Mollenhoff, *Madison: A History of the Formative Years*. 2nd. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003) 182.

³ Stuart D. Levitan, *Madison: The Illustrated Sesquicentennial History, Volume 1: 1856-1931* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 100.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Colleen Schmit, photographer. "Gisholt Machine Co. Plaque." Photograph. Madison, WI. Nov. 2016.

⁶ "Tenney-Lapham Old Market Place Neighborhood Plan," 16. June 1995

Solidarity during a labor strike brought benefits to manufacturing employees, many of whom lived in the neighborhood. On July 1, 1968, over one thousand production workers employed by Gisholt Machine Co. walked out of work, and their strike continued until the end of September.⁷ The workers negotiated improved pension benefits and a 67 cent raise over three years, an impressive amount given their average hourly wage of \$3.24.⁸ The community formed at the factories in the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood allowed workers to cooperatively fight for, and achieve, their common goals.

The 1400 block of East Dayton Street was home to the Fuller and Johnson Manufacturing Co. factory, where workers created connections with each other daily. Today, some buildings still stand at the site, but they are no longer centers of neighborhood community formation. The unexplained pile of wooden planks, debris, concrete slab, and metal pipe occupying the property stand in contrast to the surrounding residential area. The block is now a landscape devoid of people and interactions. The Fuller and Johnson Manufacturing Co. buildings that were instrumental in the growth of neighborhood now sit idly. Some manufacturing buildings in the area have been divided up to house businesses or offices.⁹ Thus, these buildings still provide spaces to build communities, but many people who work in the neighborhood today commute from outside it. They do form connections with the landscape of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood through their work, but they return home to a different location.

Changing methods of transportation reduced the interactions between residents of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood. Streetcar transportation in Madison began in 1884 with mule-

⁷ Stu Levitan, "1968: A Wild Time in Madison," *Isthmus* (Madison WI), Aug. 24, 2008.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Elaine Rattunde (Grandmother of author and resident of 1243 East Dayton St. since 1926), in discussion with the author, November 2016.

powered streetcars, followed by electric streetcars starting in 1892.¹⁰ Streetcars ran frequently along East Johnson Street from the Capitol Square. After reaching North Baldwin Street, the streetcars turned to the right and headed up and over the hill. At East Washington Avenue, the streetcars reversed their direction and headed back along North Baldwin and East Johnson.¹¹ Streetcars were used by the vast majority of residents of Madison, and provided a convenient method of transportation from what at the time was the eastern edge of Madison to downtown.¹² Automobiles granted increased opportunities for individual mobility, and a growing number of people in Madison purchased them so that they could commute and travel without being tied to the schedule and route of the streetcars. Automobiles first outnumbered horses in Madison in 1916.¹³ As more residents of Madison had their own automobile and thus didn't rely on streetcars for transportation, ridership fell. After years of fiscal problems, the final straw for Madison streetcars came from a damaging ice storm, and the streetcars ceased to run in 1935.¹⁴

After the disappearance of streetcars, residents often opted for automobiles to commute. In 1995, 58.8% of all workers living in the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood used cars to commute to work.¹⁵ 14.9% took the bus, 24.4% walked, biked, or used other means, and 1.9% worked at home.¹⁶ At the turn of the 20th century most residents rode streetcars, but today cars are preferred over public buses. Because private cars now constitute the primary method of commuting, fewer neighbor interactions occur on today's public transit. Additionally, streetcars

¹⁰ David V. Mollenhoff, *Madison: A History of the Formative Years*. 2nd. 202 and 204.

¹¹ Elaine Rattunde, in discussion with the author, November 2016.

¹² David V. Mollenhoff, *Madison: A History of the Formative Years*. 2nd. 205.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 346.

¹⁴ Elaine Rattunde, in discussion with the author, November 2016.

¹⁵ "Tenney-Lapham Old Market Place Neighborhood Plan," 17. June 1995.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

directly connected North Baldwin Street to the Capitol Square, whereas public buses now follow myriad routes through the vast metropolitan area.

The Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Association takes pride in the fact that residents can “bike, walk, and bus conveniently to work or shopping,” but more than 90% of households in the neighborhood own at least one vehicle.^{17,18} Public transportation and the walkability of the neighborhood might prompt households to own only one car as opposed to multiple, and the car might be used less often. When Elaine was young, her father always took the streetcar or walked to work, and she walked to school, so the family’s car wasn’t used most days of the week. They only took the car out on Sundays to go to church and visit Elaine’s aunt and uncle’s farm.¹⁹ Given that more Tenney-Lapham households own a car than the percentage of residents that drive to work, it is very likely that some residents only use their car occasionally, just like Elaine’s family did. Regardless of how often they are used, cars need spaces to be parked.²⁰ Many properties in the neighborhood have driveways carved out of the side yards.²¹ Since yards are better places for children to play than driveways, prioritizing space for cars on the property leaves less yard spaces for recreational activities outside that could prompt interactions between neighbors.

The speed and volume of traffic passing through an area set the ambient tone for that region. East Johnson and East Gorham became one-way streets in the 1950s, and neighborhood

¹⁷ “Tenney-Lapham Neighborhood Association,” last modified Nov. 2016, <http://www.tenneylapham.org/>.

¹⁸ University of Wisconsin Applied Population Laboratory. “Madison Neighborhood Indicators Report, 2015 ed.” Summary Report: Appendix C. 82. Apr. 27, 2016.

¹⁹ Elaine Rattunde, in discussion with the author, November 2016.

²⁰ Relative of Elaine Rattunde, photographer. “Elaine Rattunde on 1200 Block of East Dayton Street with Duke (Dog) and Plymouth Car.” Photograph. Madison, WI. c. 1941

²¹ Colleen Schmit, photographer. “Driveway Between Houses.” Photograph. Madison, WI. Nov. 2016.

residents feared that faster cars would reduce their quality of community life.²² Elaine's aunt called City Hall to ask if her taxes would be reduced since the neighborhood streets were going to become raceways with faster cars.²³ No such compensation occurred, but the traffic on the streets did become heavier and faster. Today, they carry many people past the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood, and in 2010, between 28,000 and 40,500 vehicles passed through East Johnson and East Gorham per day.²⁴ This large volume of traffic zipping through the isthmus treats these roads more as highways than residential area streets. Therefore, East Gorham and East Johnson reduce the "neighborly feel" of Tenney-Lapham today.²⁵ Many residents think that these one-way thoroughfares have negatively affected the "livability and economic development of the area."²⁶ When these residents talk about livability, they might be referring to the safety of walking around the neighborhood, especially with young children, and the risks of fast-moving traffic. These busy thoroughfares reduce the ability of residents to move freely across the landscape of their own neighborhood. Economic development might be depressed, since the majority of people speed by the neighborhood without stopping to patronize local businesses. The neighborhood is fairly quiet, but from my experience of walking around, the loudest and most frequent noises come from the streets with high volumes of traffic.

Many houses built in this streetcar suburb have porches, which allowed parents to routinely sit outside and watch their children play in the streets. Spending leisure time outside the

²² Dean Mosiman, "One Way or Two Way? Debate Continues on the Johnson-Gorham Question," *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI), Apr. 24, 2012.

²³ Elaine Rattunde, in discussion with the author, November 2016.

²⁴ Jeffrey S. Held, "Report for City of Madison, Wisconsin: East Johnson Street Traffic Study," Mar. 2012.

²⁵ Samara Kalk Derby, "Tenney-Lapham Surviving, Even Thriving, with New Development," *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI), Sep. 13, 2016.

²⁶ Steven Elbow, "Plan to Keep Johnson and Gorham Streets One-way Rubs Some the Wrong Way," *Cap Times* (Madison, WI), Apr. 22, 2012.

house facilitated interactions and a sense of community between neighbors. As I walked around the neighborhood on a beautiful 60-degree Saturday in early November, I did not see anyone spending time on the porches of the houses or interacting with neighbors. Elaine recalls that before the prevalence of automobiles, neighbors often played catch in the street. In the winter, the 1200 block of Dayton Street was occasionally blocked off to allow the neighborhood children to sled down the hill.²⁷ Due to the increased likelihood of being hit by a car, recreation in the streets has become almost nonexistent and has migrated to areas like Tenney Park. Many porches are now used to store bicycles.²⁸ Depending on the weather, bicycles are an appealing method of transportation because, like cars, they allow individual transportation that does not rely on a specific schedule and route of a streetcar or bus. Bicycles are used for recreation in the neighborhood in addition to commuting. In the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood, East Mifflin Street is a designated bike boulevard, which encourages safer biking on this street with low car traffic.

When Elaine was young, almost all the houses in the neighborhood were occupied by families with children.²⁹ Many houses have since been subdivided into apartments and new apartment complexes have been built. This shift from families to primarily single residents is evidenced by the fact that less than 27% of housing units are owner-occupied and less than 10% of households are inhabited by families with children.^{30,31} With children in the neighborhood going to school and playing together, parents had additional opportunities to interact with each

²⁷ Elaine Rattunde, in discussion with the author, November 2016.

²⁸ Colleen Schmit, photographer. "East Dayton Street Porch with Bikes." Photograph. Madison, WI. Nov. 2016.

²⁹ Elaine Rattunde, in discussion with the author, November 2016.

³⁰ University of Wisconsin Applied Population Laboratory. "Madison Neighborhood Indicators Report, 2015 ed." Summary Report: Appendix C. 5. Apr. 27, 2016.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

other. Furthermore, residents tend to live in the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood for shorter amounts of time than they did decades ago.³² Temporary residents have fewer opportunities to forge lasting communities within the neighborhood.

Information is now more easily exchanged within and beyond the neighborhood. During the Great Depression, Elaine's house had a two-party line telephone where the neighbors across the street were on the same phone line.³³ Since there was only one telephone within the house, the renters who lived upstairs needed to come downstairs to answer the phone. Today, Elaine is able use her cell phone wherever where she is. Cell phones have facilitated an increase in the ability to communicate beyond the neighborhood, but individual phones have also reduced the necessity of interactions between neighbors.

Throughout much of the history of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood, employment was largely segregated along gender lines, with a large percentage of men in the neighborhood working in factories, and the women cooking, cleaning, and sewing in the house and taking primary responsibility in raising children. Social homogenization occurred in the neighborhood since labor was divided in predictable ways. Today, gender roles are less strict for employment outside of the house, so residents of every gender disperse to work in different locations and varied occupations. While men have become increasingly involved in childcare and housework, women still spend significantly more time on these activities than men do.³⁴ Working outside the house and having primary responsibility in childcare and housework take enormous time and energy, so women are left with less leisure time to spend socializing with their neighbors than

³² Elaine Rattunde, in discussion with the author, November 2016.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Erin Rehel and Emily Baxter, "Men, Fathers, and Work-Family Balance," *Center for American Progress*. Feb. 2, 2015.

they used to have. Women are now more likely to form communities with their coworkers than with their neighbors. The dispersal of women to their jobs outside the home decreases the propensity to form communities with ties to the physical landscape of the neighborhood, and their sense of community shifts to include other locations.

Changes in shopping behavior also contributed to the dissolution of community in the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood. Before the 21st century, multiple family-run grocery stores within the neighborhood provided places for neighbors to interact. Given their small size, they were more conducive to forming relationships among patrons and individuals who worked at grocery stores. Before the prevalence of automobiles, residents would walk or take a carriage or streetcar to a small local grocery store for their frequent shopping trips. Today, it is easier to drive to larger grocery stores, which offer more options and lower prices. Due to refrigeration and preservatives, shopping trips do not need to occur as often. Small grocery stores, such as the one on the 1200 block of East Johnson Street (which was built in 1923), have closed, and the neighborhood now lacks the frequent interactions at small, family-run grocery stores.³⁵

As technology transformed occupations, many neighborhood interactions ceased to occur. When Elaine was growing up, a man routinely came by and cleaned the street using a wheelbarrow, brush, and shovel.³⁶ Today, street sweeper machines are driven through the neighborhood. Similarly, Elaine remembers getting to know the people who collected her family's garbage when she was young, but now the automated arm of a garbage truck picks it up.³⁷ Ubiquitous refrigerators made the delivery of ice to homes for iceboxes obsolete.³⁸ This

³⁵ Wisconsin Historical Society, "1255-1259 E Johnson," Property record. Accessed Nov. 10, 2016.

³⁶ Elaine Rattunde, in discussion with the author, November 2016.

³⁷ Ibid.

mechanization contributed to the reduction in opportunities for communication between employees and residents in the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood.

Residents interacted more with mail carriers when mail was delivered twice a day. Elaine recalls that life moved slower back then, and there was more time for socializing.³⁹ The man who delivered mail to Elaine's house lived behind her family down East Mifflin Street. One time, as he walked up to their house, the mail carrier exclaimed that he saw that Elaine's brother was having a good time at wherever he was, since the mail carrier had already read a postcard from him before delivering it.⁴⁰ Today, mail carriers do not comment on private mail to the recipients of the mail and it is unlikely that residents of Tenney-Lapham know where their mail carrier lives. The professional life of mail carriers is further separated from their personal life. Additionally, correspondence through written letters has widely been replaced by email, text messaging, and video chat services.

Some aspects of life in the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood have not significantly changed since its beginnings. While the neighborhood has become slightly more ethnically diverse, it is still overwhelmingly white, with 91.9% of its residents being white in 1995.⁴¹ Residents still use Tenney Park for recreation, such as ice-skating during the winter. It is undoubtedly possible to form communities tied to the landscape of the Tenney-Lapham today, and some residents do have deep connections with their neighbors and the land. But many factors have made it easier to create communities outside the neighborhood.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Tenney-Lapham Old Market Place Neighborhood Plan," 15. June 1995.

In the past, the communities that residents belonged to were primarily closely tied to the land of Tenney-Lapham. Today, people find additional communities in geographic areas apart from the neighborhood, such as the places where they work, worship, and exercise. The virtual landscape of social media has facilitated myriad daily interactions unbound from any physical land. Neighbors may walk past each other today while gazing at their smartphones, instead of meeting each other and forming relationships. As transportation and the spread of information became faster and easier, the scope of community diffused beyond the borders of the Tenney-Lapham neighborhood and became less confined to its landscape.

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Photos



Schmit, Colleen, photographer. "Gisholt Machine Co. Plaque." Photograph. Madison, WI. Nov. 2016.



Relative of Elaine Rattunde, photographer. "Elaine Rattunde on 1200 Block of East Dayton Street with Duke (Dog) and Plymouth Car." Photograph. Madison, WI. c. 1941.



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