

CHAPTER 2 – JOPLIN'S HISTORIC CHARACTER

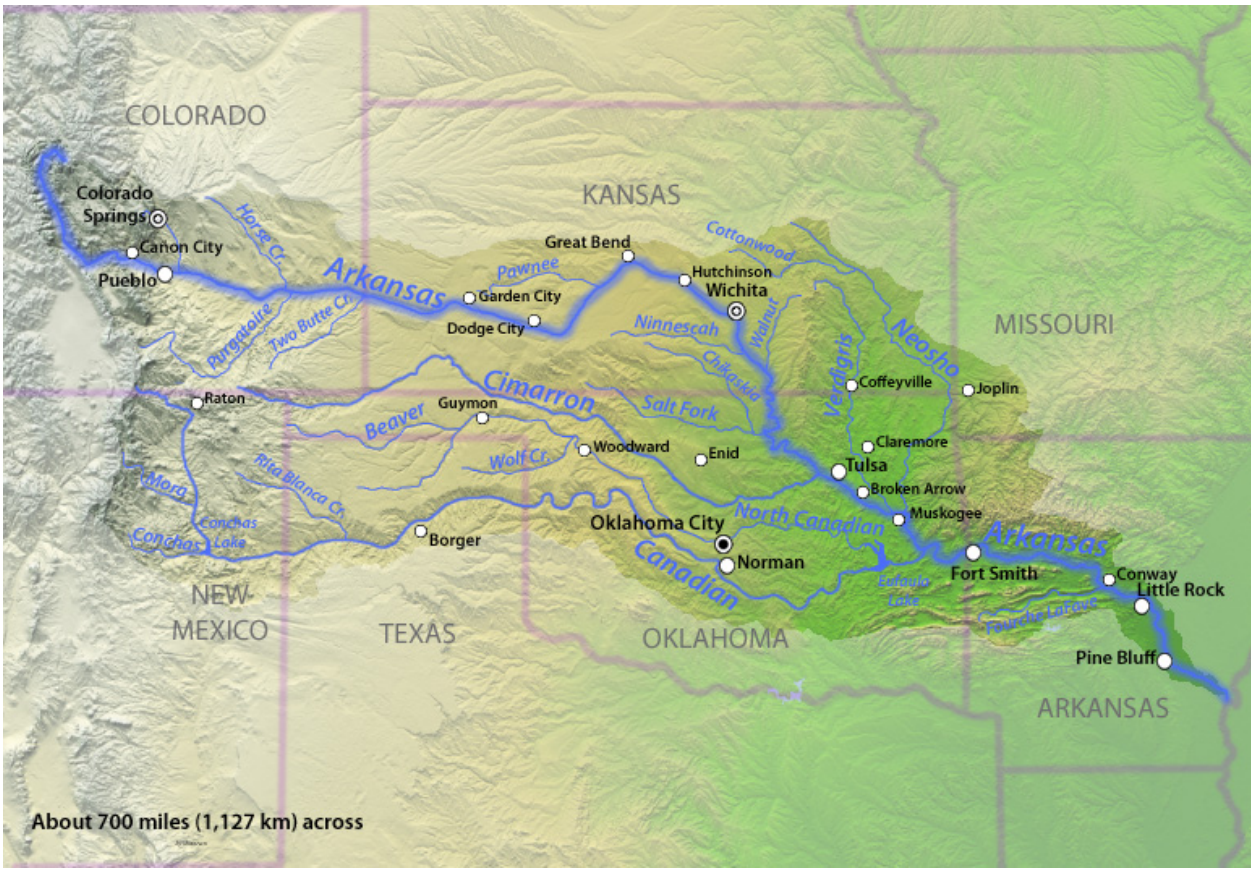
Joplin is significant as the commercial center of the Tri-State Mining District encompassing portions of southwest Missouri, southeastern Kansas, and northeast Oklahoma. From its founding in the 1870s through the mid-twentieth century, Joplin served as the marketing, commercial, and transportation hub of the mining district, providing a focus for a large area well beyond its borders.

After World War II lead and zinc mining within the region declined, yet Joplin has continued to grow and evolve. Today, Joplin retains much of its historic character, particularly in its downtown core and surrounding residential neighborhoods. It is this historic character, its contributing features, and the quality of life that they provide that are the subject of the Historic Preservation Plan.

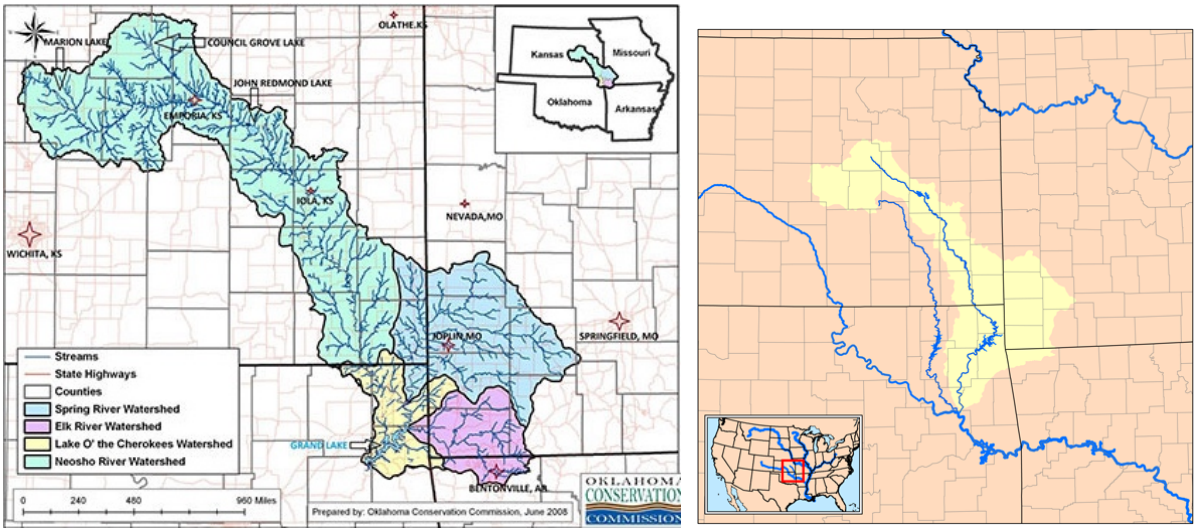
2.1 REGIONAL CONTEXT

Joplin is located within the watershed of the Spring River, a tributary of the Neosho River and the Arkansas River. Geographically, it is positioned at the northwest edge of the Springfield Plateau, a portion of the Ozark Highlands ecoregion.

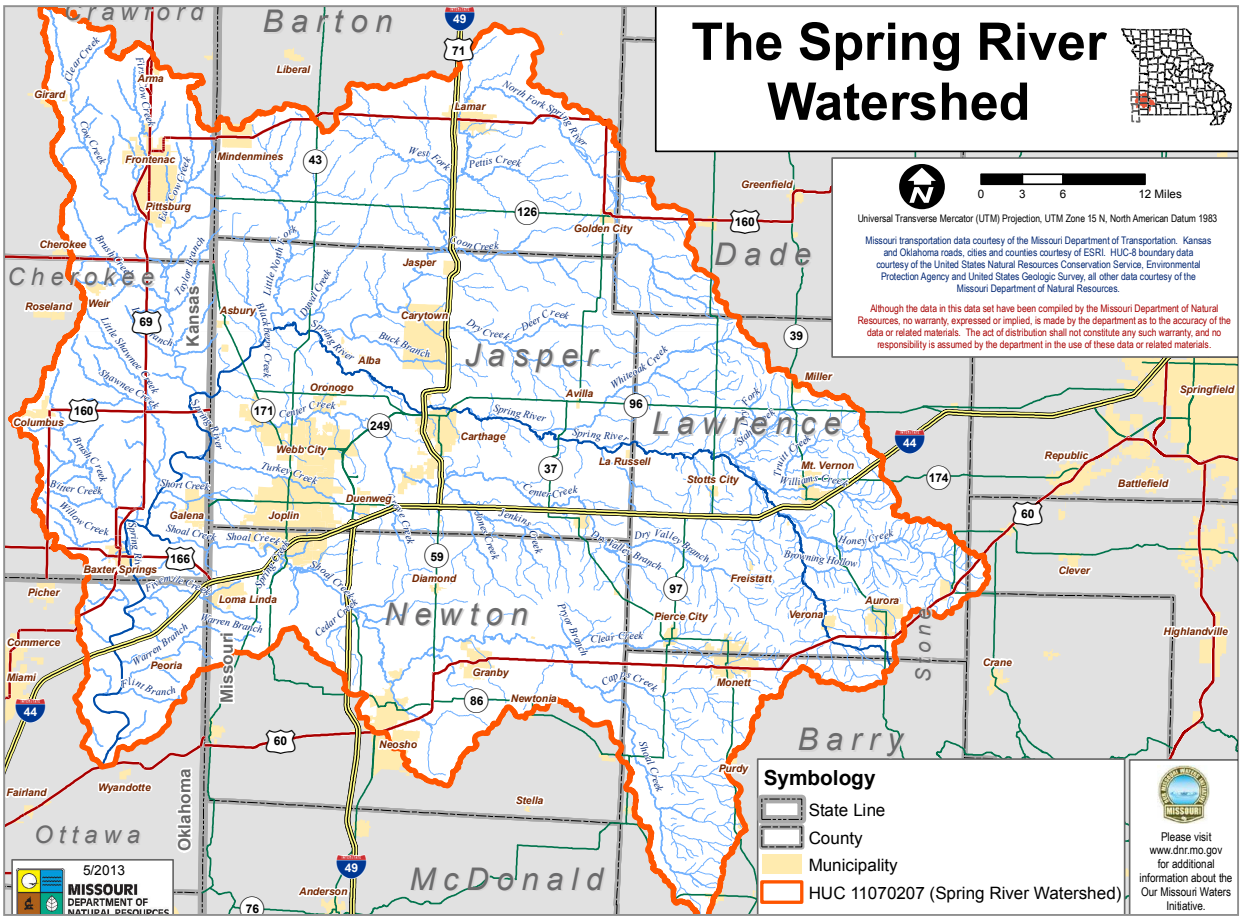
The Spring River originates near Aurora, Missouri and flows north and west toward the Missouri/Kansas border. About seventy-five percent of the river's watershed, 2,777 square miles, is within southwest Missouri. Once in Kansas, the river turns south, joining the Neosho River near Wyandotte in northeastern Oklahoma.



Arkansas River Watershed (Shanon1 2015).



Grand Lake and Neosho River Watersheds (Left: Kmussler 2015; Right: GLWAF 2015).



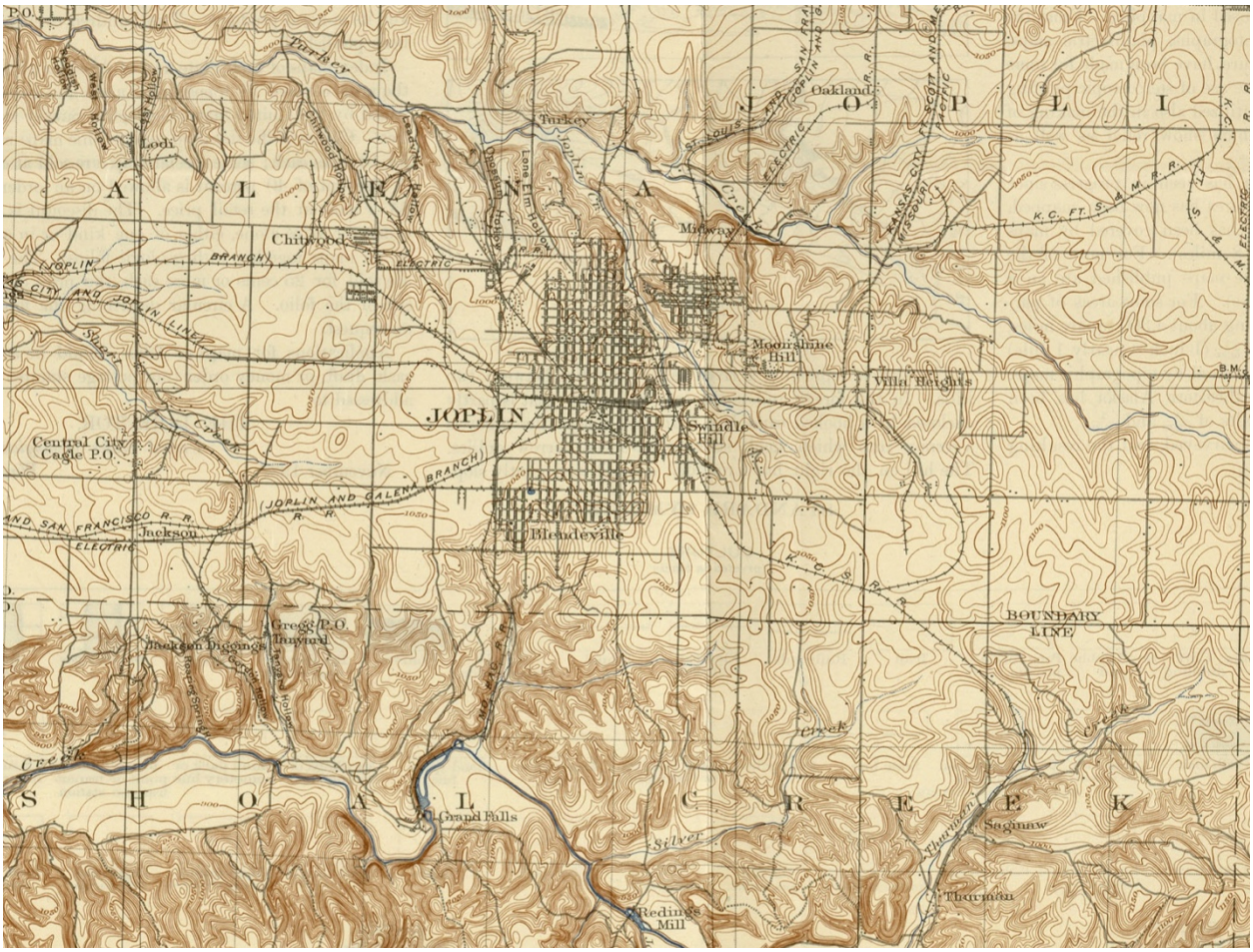
The Spring River Watershed (MO DNR).

Turkey Creek and Shoal Creek are tributaries of the Spring River and flow through Joplin. Turkey Creek is Joplin's primary watercourse. Its main channel flows east to west just north of the city, joining the Spring River at the Missouri/Kansas border.

Joplin Creek, a smaller tributary of Turkey Creek, flows diagonally southeast to northwest through the heart of the city. The City of Joplin was founded as two separate communities on either side of the valley of Joplin Creek. Between the two communities, on the east bank of the creek, was the location of a mine shaft sunk in August 1870 that struck a rich body of lead ore about thirty-five or forty feet below grade. This began the mining boom and led to Joplin's founding. The location of the discovery mine is believed to have been about 500 feet north of the old Broadway viaduct (Renner 1985:25).

In addition to mining activities, the valley of Joplin Creek provided level topography for development of an extensive railroad network that connected Joplin to the surrounding mines of the Tri-State Mining District and connected the Mining District to the nation. With the decline of mining after World War II and the subsequent removal of most of the railroads, the valley of Joplin Creek has become park land, Joplin's primary belt of open space and a valuable community resource.


JOPLIN
Webb City
Carterville
Duenweg
Oronogo
Galena
Empire City
Spring River
Shoal Creek
Turkey Creek
Center Creek
Short Creek
Joplin Creek
Buffalo Creek
Dry Fork
Cow Creek
Willow Branch
Lone Elm Creek
Prosperity
Zincite
Webb City and Carterville Electric Railway
Kansas City, Fort Scott and Memphis Railway
St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad
Missouri Pacific Railroad
Kansas City Southern Railway
Missouri and Kansas Interurban Railway
Joplin and Pittsburg Railway
Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma Railroad
Frisco Railroad
Kansas City

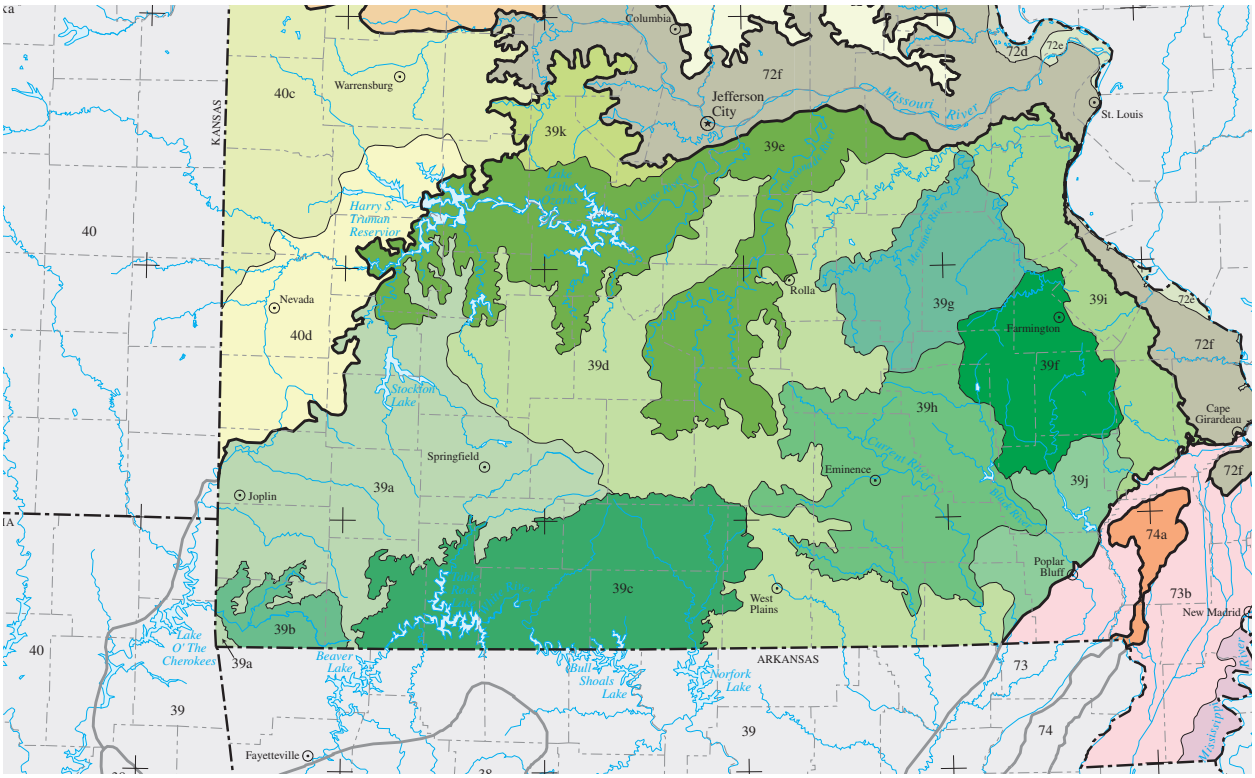


Joplin in 1900; detail of a USGS map of the Joplin District of Missouri and Kansas showing topography, creeks, roads, and railroads. A more complete view of the map is shown on the facing page. (U Texas 1900).

Shoal Creek flows east to west just south of Joplin and joins the Spring River just west of the Missouri/Kansas border. Larger than Turkey Creek, Shoal Creek has a wider, deeper valley known for its rock outcroppings, waterfalls, and wooded slopes. Shoal Creek has served as an important water source for Joplin as well as a recreational resource.

The Ozark Highlands is a large geographical area encompassing much of southern Missouri, northern Arkansas, and a portion of northeast Oklahoma and has been identified as a Level III ecoregion. Ecoregions denote areas of general similarity in ecosystems and in the type, quality, and quantity of environmental resources. Ecoregions are identified to serve as a framework for the research, assessment, management, and monitoring of ecosystems and ecosystem components (EPA 2014).

The Ozark Highlands is the most significant highland region in central North America due to its diverse topographic, geologic, soil, and hydrologic conditions supporting a broad range of habitat types. The Highlands are characterized by extreme biological diversity and the uniqueness of its species. Overall, its vegetation communities are dominated by open oak-hickory and shortleaf pine woodlands and forests (USGS 2009).



Ecoregions in southern Missouri – regions labeled 39 are part of the Ozark Highlands Ecoregion. The Springfield Plateau, labeled 39a, is a Level IV sub-region of the Ozark Highlands (US EPA 2002).

The Spring River watershed and Joplin are located within a sub-region of the Ozark Highlands known as the Springfield Plateau (also called the Springfield Plain). The Springfield Plateau is a broad dissected plain with less relief than neighboring, more rugged portions of the Ozark Highlands.

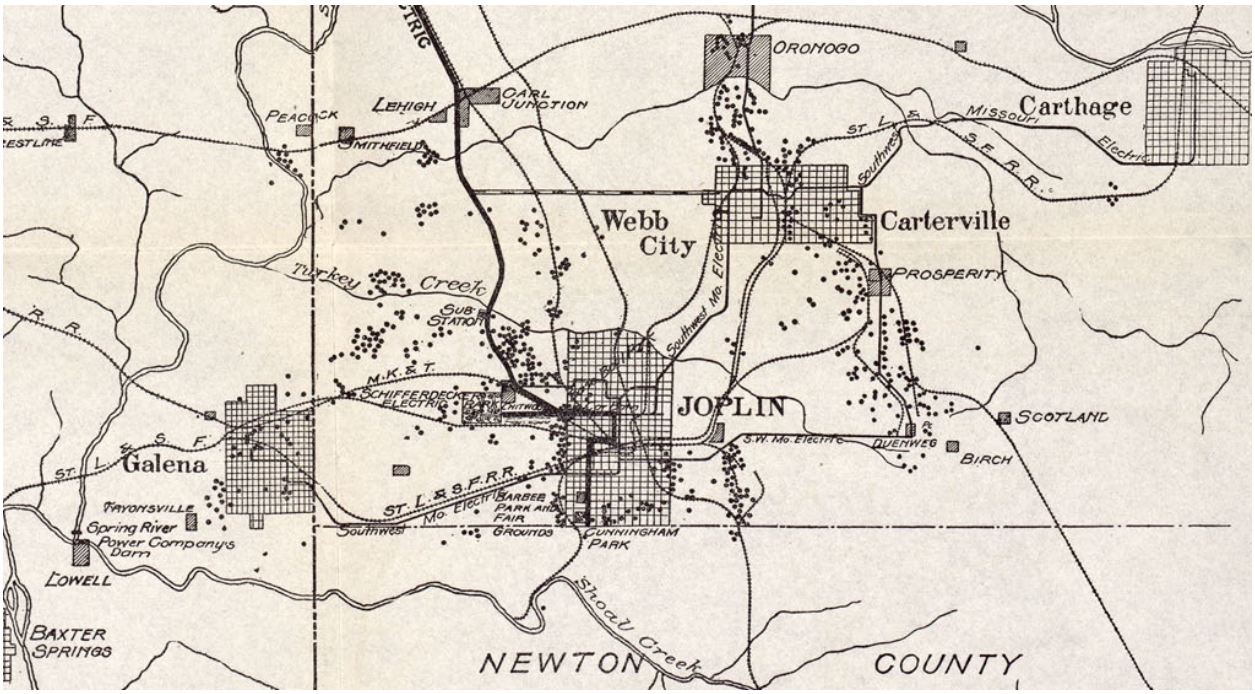
Geologically, the Springfield Plateau is largely underlain by the highly soluble and fractured limestone and chert of the Mississippi Boone Formation. Caves, sinkholes, and underground drainage occur, heavily influencing surface water availability, water temperature, and the potential for surface and groundwater pollution. Clear, cold, perennial spring-fed streams with gravel or bedrock bottoms are common. In addition, many small dry valleys occur where overland flow is entirely runoff-driven. Losing streams are common, which allows water to flow directly into the groundwater system through streambeds. During the summer dry period, springs and groundwater recharge sustain stream flows. Springs are a natural resurgence of groundwater, usually on a hillside or the valley floor. Soils are often cherty and have developed from carbonate rocks or interbedded chert, sandstone, and shale (GLWAF 2008:14; US EPA 2014).

Prior to the nineteenth century, uplands on the Springfield Plateau were dominated by oak-hickory forest with areas of savanna and tall grass prairie that were maintained by fire. The forests were particularly evident in dissected valleys such as that of Shoal Creek. Today, much of the forest, and nearly all of the prairie, have been replaced by pasture, hayland, and expanding residential areas (US EPA 2014; Teal 2013).

Lead and Zinc Ores

The limestone geology of the Springfield Plateau is particularly significant to the region's history due to its accumulation of lead and zinc ores. The sediments that solidified into the cherty limestone of the region were deposited at the bottom of an inland sea during the Mississippian period. They then became exposed at the surface and subjected to erosion. Over time, the softer limestone was leached from the beds, while the more resistant chert remained. Caves developed in some places, but in many places the removal of the limestone caused the beds to collapse. These collapsed beds contained mostly broken pieces of chert and were very porous and permeable. Later these beds became the sites of ore deposition.

Following this period of erosion, the seas returned and shale sediments were deposited on top of the Mississippian rocks. The lead and zinc ores found in the Tri-State Mining District are believed to have formed from hot, metal-bearing solutions that originated deep within the earth. These solutions probably rose along major faults and fractures until they reached the Mississippian beds. The shale that had been deposited over them (still evident in the northern portion of the watershed) acted as an impermeable barrier or cap to the rising metal-bearing solutions and forced them to migrate laterally. These solutions spread through the broken beds of chert and other porous and permeable layers in the Mississippian limestone, depositing the lead sulfide (galena), zinc sulfide (sphalerite), and other associated materials (KGS 2001:2). The presence of these rich lead and zinc ore deposits within the region are the basis for the Tri-State Mining District's development.

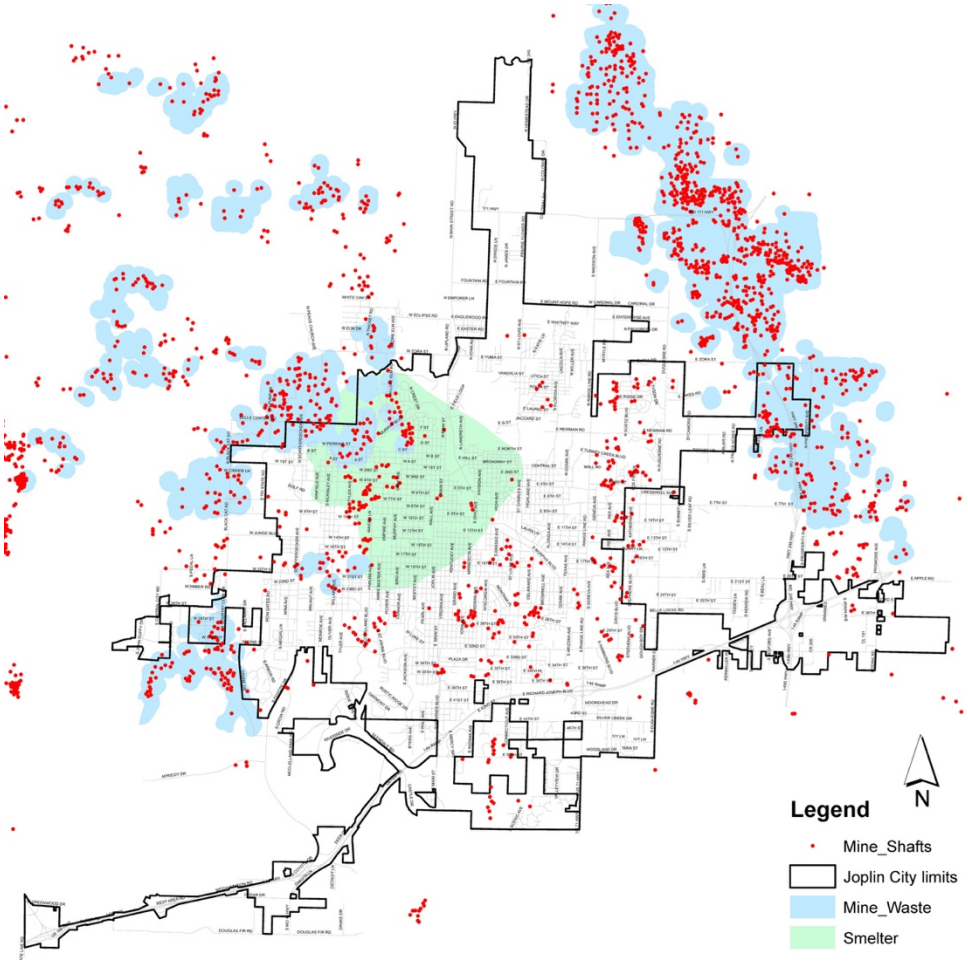


Railroad map from 1913 showing the distribution of mines in the vicinity around Joplin (U Texas 1913).

Environmental Legacy

The extensive mining operations undertaken in parts of the Tri-State Mining District and Spring River watershed from the mid-1800's to the mid-1900's had serious environmental consequences. The limestone and chert of the district contain moderately high concentrations of lead (Pb), zinc (Zn), cadmium (Cd), and other heavy metals that can be highly toxic, produce a number of detrimental health conditions, and tend to bioaccumulate in animal flesh with continued exposure.

As a result of the mining operations, large amounts of mine tailings (or "chat") were extracted from the ground and piled on the surface. Water flowing through ore-bearing rock at the surface, tailings, and abandoned mines below the surface leach heavy metals from the rocks into local water bodies. In addition, rocks and tailings exposed at the surface wash into local streams by overland erosion and are transported downstream in the form of metal-bearing stream deposits. These sediments contain heavy metal concentrations that far exceed the background soil conditions in the area (GLWAF 2008:21)



Distribution of mine shafts, mine waste, and smelter waste in and around Joplin (City of Joplin).

The problems with heavy metals are severe enough to have resulted in the listing of several Superfund sites within the Tri-State Mining District, including in Jasper

and Newton Counties in Missouri, the Cherokee County Superfund Site in southeast Kansas, and the Tar Creek Superfund Site in northeast Oklahoma.

Extensive areas of open mine tailings are located immediately north of Joplin. In the 1990s, lead contaminated soils in residential areas of Joplin, mostly in the central-west portion of the city, were remediated by soil removal and covering. Following the 2011 tornado, additional remediation of disturbed areas of soil was undertaken. Superfund cleanups continue within the region. Contamination with heavy metals remains the leading issue related to stream quality throughout the Spring River watershed and impacts the Neosho River and Grand Lakes downstream as well (GLWAF 2008:21; US EPA 2003 & 2015).

Landscape resources—geology, landforms, water, waterways, soils, plant communities, and wildlife—provide the context for the historical development of Joplin and the Tri-State Mining District. These resources are critical components of the city's cultural landscape.

2.2 WRITINGS ON JOPLIN'S HISTORY

A number of interesting books have been prepared on Joplin's history in recent years. All are illustrated histories that feature photographs of historic Joplin with background and commentary. Three of the illustrated histories were authored by Leslie Simpson of the Post Memorial Art Reference Library. One of her books features historic postcard images, and another features comparison then-vs-now photographs of lost buildings and their sites today (Simpson 1999, 2009 & 2011).

In 2013, Priscilla Purcell Brown completed work on an *Images of America* series paperback on Joplin featuring historic photographs from her personal collection and the collections of others. The Images of America series published by Acadia Publishing is one of the most widespread and important photographic records on American communities. They have helped make local history accessible to a broad public. It is good that Joplin is among them (Brown 2013).

Between 2005 and 2015, The Joplin Globe published three books in what hopefully is a continuing series on periods in Joplin's history. Books in 2005 and 2015 feature the images of Joplin photographer Murwin Moser. The 2015 book includes photographs specifically from the decade of the 1940s. Both books were authored by Brad Belk, Executive Director of the Joplin Historical & Mineral Museums Inc. The third book, published in 2014, is a collection of images contributed by residents representing Joplin history through 1969 to which Brad Belk contributed as well (Joplin Globe 2014 & 2015). These are all excellent books and help visitors and residents appreciate Joplin's history.

The most recent general history of Joplin is G.K. Renner's *Joplin, From Mining Town to Urban Center* published in 1985. Also described as an illustrated history, the book captures the broad history of Joplin through its successive periods of growth and development. Renner's book was published in recognition of Joplin's centennial. It is the best history available, but as Renner notes in his introduction, the book is a commemorative publication and very general and that a more thorough history of Joplin needs to be prepared.

The best overview of Joplin's physical development is in a 2008 Multiple Property Document Form prepared by Sally Schwenk Associates, Inc. for the Joplin Historic Preservation Commission through a Certified Local Government grant received through the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office. Though based on Renner and a limited number of other available source documents, The Multiple Property Document Form thoughtfully traces Joplin's physical development and relates it to national historic contexts. This document provides a basis for the future survey and documentation of Joplin's historic resources.

National Register nominations have been prepared for portions of Downtown Joplin and have focused on the commercial development of the city's downtown core. The histories included in these nominations are based primarily on the Multiple Property Documentation Form noted above and some of the references it cites. The nomination forms have begun citing each other, beginning a cycle of circular referencing that indicates a limit has been reached with the information available in existing secondary sources. New research needs to be undertaken using primary sources to better document and understand Joplin's history and historical development.

The Joplin Museum and Joplin Historical Society have been active in undertaking research on the city's history but have been limited by manpower and time. There is need for a new comprehensive, contemporary history of Joplin relating the city and its resources to regional, state and national contexts, which is discussed in Chapter 4 of this preservation plan.

2.3 JOPLIN'S HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Multiple Property Documentation Form prepared for Joplin in 2008, noted above, provides the background for understanding and documenting Joplin's historic resources (Schwenk 2008). This section of Chapter 2 summarizes and provides commentary on the information included in the Multiple Property Documentation Form and an extensive field review of the city's historic resources undertaken as part of this preservation plan.

The City of Joplin's 1990 Preservation Plan includes historical information, much of which has been incorporated into the historical overview in the Multiple Resource Documentation Form. The 1990 Preservation Plan also divides the city into survey areas based upon historic neighborhoods that were developed as the city expanded. Brief historical overviews of each historic neighborhood were prepared by Leslie Simpson of the Post Memorial Art Reference Library. Both the brief histories and the identified neighborhoods remain relevant and are a good starting point for understanding and working with Joplin's physical development. They have been incorporated into the discussion below (Casey/Hill 1990).

The Multiple Property Documentation Form identifies five historic contexts through which Joplin's historic resources are related and understood. Historic contexts are patterns, events, or trends in history that occurred within the time period for which a property is being evaluated. Historic contexts help to clarify the historical importance of a property by allowing it to be compared with other places that can be tied to the context. Historic contexts related to Joplin and its

historic resources span from pre-history to the present. The historic contexts identified in the Multiple Resource Documentation Form use 1960 as an end date and include:

- A Native Landscape: Pre-1830
- Early Settlement: 1830-1870
- Evolution of Joplin as a Regional Commercial and Industrial Center: 1871-1960
- Community Development Patterns in Joplin: 1871-1960
- Architectural Styles and Vernacular Property Types: 1830-1960

The first context, A Native Landscape, outlines the natural history and natural resources of the landscape over which the city developed, discussed at the beginning of this chapter. It also includes the human development of Native American cultures in Southwest Missouri prior to the region's settlement by people of European descent. Joplin's early settlement and historic resources are addressed in the Early Settlement historic context.

The last three historic contexts address the city's development from its founding in the 1870s, the beginning of the era of intensive mining and development, to 1960, by which time mining had ended. These three contexts address Joplin's commercial and industrial development, its neighborhood development, and how it's architecture relates to national trends. These historic contexts can be extended to the present and are in the discussion of historic resources in subsequent chapters of this preservation plan.

The Natural Landscape

The natural landscape outlined in the discussion of regional context above provides the background for Joplin's historical development. An understanding and appreciation of Joplin's historic resources begins with an appreciation of the city's natural resources, the basis for why settlement happened here and how geology, topography, water resources, and plant communities influenced the city's development over time.

Prehistoric aboriginal peoples occupied Southwest Missouri for thousands of years prior to the first documentation available in the historical record. Archeological investigations verify this documentation and begin to piece together how cultures and life-ways of these peoples evolved over time. The Osage tribe of native Americans dominated Missouri from the 1500s to 1825. Their hunting grounds and seasonal villages include the watersheds and tributaries of the Spring River and Shoal Creek.

While Joplin's historical development and mining activity have wiped out much of the physical record of their presence within the city limits, the river valleys of Turkey Creek, Joplin Creek, and Shoal Creek are the most likely locations where archeological evidence of their presence may remain. Much of this bottomland is now protected as floodplain and for water quality. A good portion of it is also park land. Continued awareness and protection with respect to its archeological significance and potential to yield information about Native American occupation and culture is also warranted.

The first Europeans to explore Southwest Missouri were French explorers and traders who arrived beginning about 1719 and interacted with the native Americans throughout the state, making contact and beginning to alter their culture. In 1808, the federal government purchased the territory of what is now Jasper County from the Osage Nation (Schwenk 2008:F-3,4).

Early Settlement

Most of the early history of the area is related to the early settlement of Jasper County. By the 1830s, Jasper County began to be settled with small, largely self-sufficient farms. Corn and hay were principal crops, though some cotton was grown for cloth and sheep were raised for wool. Cattle grazed on the abundant grass in the prairies. The Mexican War in the 1840s, the California Gold Rush in 1849, and the extension of cotton cultivation into the Mississippi Valley provided a growing market regionally for livestock—cattle, horses, and mules (Renner 1985:18).

Little information is provided on the settlement and physical development of the Joplin area specifically. Joplin's first settler is understood to have been John C. Cox from Tennessee, who scouted the area in 1836 and returned with his young family in 1838 to build a log cabin on Turkey Creek. In 1841, Cox constructed a more substantial log house at today's 615 Persimmon Street and a store nearby. Cox named the store and the post office associated with it Blytheville (Renner 1985:15).

Reverend Harris G. Joplin, a Methodist minister, settled here with his family on an eighty-acre farm in 1839 and built a cabin at a spring near the intersection of today's Fifth and Club Streets. Reverend Joplin moved away in 1844, but his name became attached to the spring and the creek which it fed about one-half mile to the west, ultimately providing the name for the community (Renner 1985:18).

Small deposits of lead ore had been discovered within the region as early as 1836. In 1839, a young slave owned by John Cox found a rock of lead ore by the bank of Joplin Creek. Cox rode to Springfield to have the section of land entered in his name (Casey/Hill 1990:3).

Serious development of ore bodies within the region did not begin until 1849 when an experienced miner found lead ore and developed a mine on a farm about two miles northwest of present-day Joplin. Ore was discovered and mines and mining camps were developed near Oronogo, north of Joplin, and on Shoal Creek near Granby, southeast of Joplin, by 1850. The arrival of professional miners signified a growing awareness that the deposits were extensive enough to support full-scale mining (Renner 1985:18-19).

Miners migrated into the area and joined local farmers who engaged in mining shallow deposits by hand. Despite this growth, large expanses of the county remained unsettled and the largest communities were small villages (Schwenk 2008:E-6; Renner 1985:19). By the outbreak of the Civil War in 1860, mining operations were well established at several locations in Newton and Jasper Counties. However, the dependency upon wagon transport limited the extent of mine development.

Mining activities were interrupted by the war, but afterward mining resumed and acted as a stimulus to attract settlers to the region. In 1867 the Granby Mining and Smelting Company began acquiring large tracts of land in the region which it leased to small miners. In 1870, with $500 obtained from a company prize for the most amount of lead produced in a four-month period, two Oronogo miners leased a ten-acre tract on Joplin Creek and began sinking a shaft on the creek's east bank. The mine, known as the "Discovery Shaft," was located about 500 feet north of the former Broadway viaduct. They discovered a rich body of ore at about the thirty-five or forty-foot level. News of their discovery sparked a sustained boom that led to the founding of Joplin and eventually made it the leading city of the Tri-State Mining District (Renner 1985:25).

Early Settlement Resources

Few historic resources remain from the period of Joplin's early settlement. Most significant and representative is the Cox Homestead north of the East Town neighborhood and East Persimmon Street.

In 1866, John Cox constructed a brick house north of his earlier log residence at 615 East Persimmon Street. The house and its surrounding property remain in the ownership of Cox family descendants today. A large property, the Cox Homestead still reflects the agricultural nature of the early settlement period. Its study as a cultural landscape could provide insight into the nineteenth century use of agricultural land in the Joplin area. The property includes the Cox family cemetery.



The Cox Homestead just north of the East Town neighborhood; The 1866 brick residence is just left of center. The Cox family cemetery is left of center at the top (Google Earth).

Information on other properties of the early settlement period have not been found in the limited secondary sources referenced for this preservation plan.

Early histories of Joplin and primary source documents could provide more information and should be a topic of future study.

Primarily agricultural in nature, Joplin's pre-mining history is closely related to the use of the natural landscape, such as proximity to springs for residences and barns, creek bottomlands for crops, upland prairie for pastureland, and woodlands for fuel and wood products. The layout and use of the Cox Homestead or Reverend Joplin's 80-acre farm as referenced in Renner is closely related to the natural resources available within the property boundaries.

Mapping property boundaries from this era; the known locations of buildings and farmsteads; early wagon roads; springs and watercourses; topography; and soils would help provide a picture of how the Joplin area appeared and developed in the decades before the mining boom. With the establishment of a store and a post office, clearly there was more here than has been referenced in recent secondary sources.

The Mining Landscape

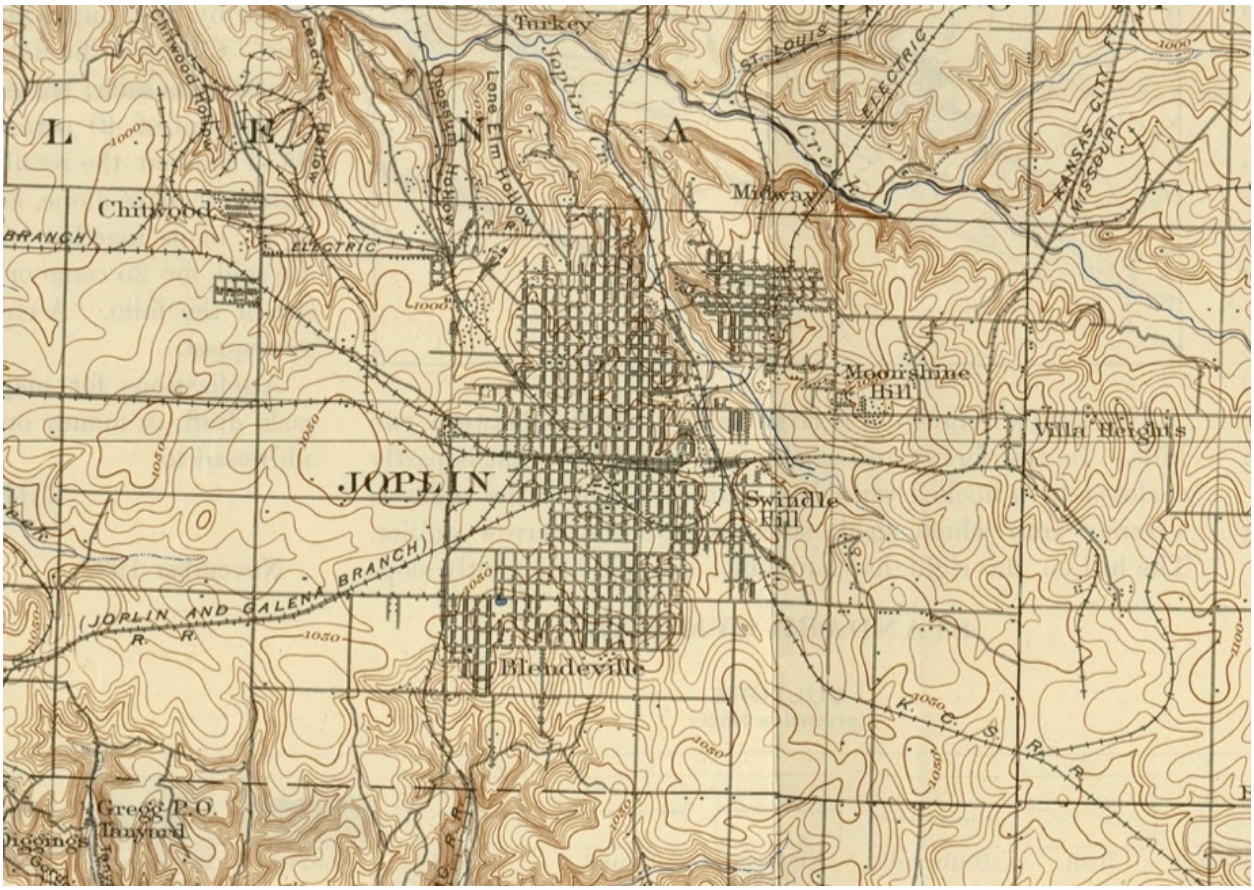
With the discovery of large, shallow deposits of lead within what would become the Joplin city limits, miners flocked to the area. By the summer of 1871, a year after the initial discovery, some 500 people had settled within the valley of Joplin Creek, creating a mining camp and living in tents, pole shelters covered with brush, and makeshift box houses. In the fall of 1871, investors organized the Joplin Mining and Smelting Company and purchased 120 acres of John Cox's land located in the valley north of today's 4th Street. Within a year, the area had increased to a population of 2000 (Renner 1985:25-26; Casey/Hill 1990:4).

The shallow deposits along Joplin Creek required only a shovel, pick, bucket, and windlass for hoisting the ore bucket out of the mine. The majority of early mines were small, each camp having its own smelter. The limitations of wagon transportation kept the initial camps small. Wagons carried the ore to the Spring River where it was loaded onto flatboats and floated west to the Grand River and on to the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers, eventually reaching New Orleans (Schwenk 2008:E-14).

Wagon freighting connected the area to railheads that had been established within the region. Most heavy freight came by rail to Baxter Springs, thirteen miles due west, and then was teamed to Joplin, a route that involved fording both Spring River and Shoal Creek. The first railroad was completed into Joplin in 1877, connecting to Girard, Kansas. Others followed in the 1880s (Renner 1985:30).

Joplin's early boom lasted until 1877, when the city's shallow deposits of lead were nearly exhausted and important discoveries were made in other areas within the mining district. But with changes in the mining industry in the late nineteenth century, particularly mechanization driven first by steam power and then by electrically driven machines beginning in 1890, Joplin's deeper ore beds could be exploited. Mining activities spread across the Joplin landscape, organized through a leasing system in which land companies leased tracts to mine operators and provided them with services. Joplin experienced its most rapid growth between 1890 and 1910 (Renner 1985:37).

The landscape that resulted is difficult to see today. Maps produced in 1900 show the extent of mining activity that spread across the landscape. The USGS topographic survey prepared in 1900, reproduced below and earlier in this chapter, shows the extent of the city that had developed by that time along with the network of railroad lines that had been established.



Further enlargement of the 1900 USGS map showing extent of Joplin's physical development by that date.

Sanborn maps also produced in 1900 show the extent of mine development in more detail. Mining operations were spread across the city. A map reproduced earlier in this chapter shows the locations of mine shafts, mine waste, and smelter waste across Joplin. Mine shafts were located throughout the city with intense concentrations in the west and to the northeast.

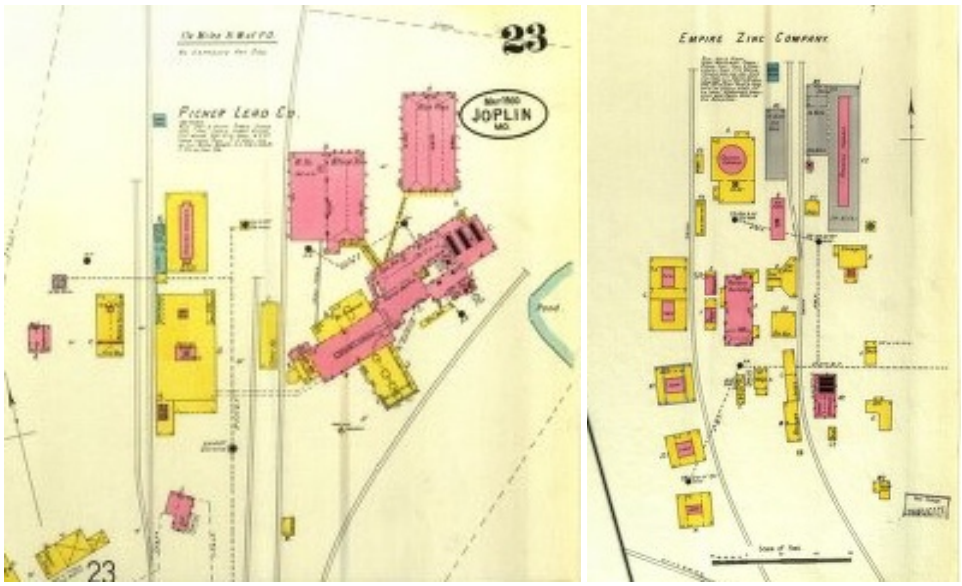
The Sanborn maps show each mining operation in detail, with its configuration of shafts, smelters, outbuildings, and waste ponds. Some mine operations were located within residential neighborhoods, with residential lots and houses around them. Others were located outside of the settled area. However, over time as the city has grown, these operations as well have been developed into today's residential neighborhoods.

Mining Landscape Resources

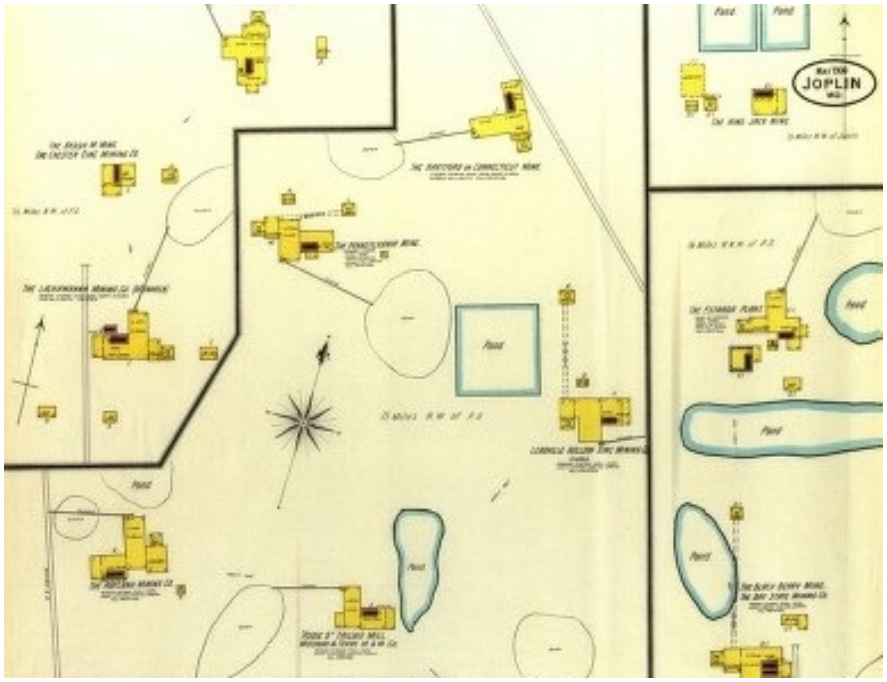
The mining landscape throughout Joplin was pervasive and complex. Today it is hard to appreciate because almost all of the mine structures have been removed. Mine operations included numerous buildings in a fully industrialized landscape.



Mining landscape of the Joplin district from a 1907 industry publication.



The detailed layouts of two larger operations within Joplin in 1900 (U MO 1900).



Sanborn map with examples of the many smaller mine operations located outside of the settled area of the city in 1900 but today within the city's boundaries (U MO 1900).



Portion of the North Heights neighborhood between C and D Streets in 1900 (left) and today (right); the Sanborn map shows a mine operation with mine shafts, buildings, and waste pond along a platted but unopened West D Street. Small residences are located on lots immediately to the south. Today this is a thriving neighborhood.

Mine operations included the shafts, smelters, support buildings, haul roads, railroad lines, tailing piles, waste ponds, electric lines, and other structures. Some operations were located within platted residential areas, with miners' housing developed around them. Networks of interconnected mine shafts followed the geology of the ore beds below the ground. Above ground, tailing piles accumulated and the areas were devoid of vegetation.

Today, the character and extent of the mining landscape within Joplin's city limits is difficult to see. The mining operations exist as a ghost image across today's community. Mine shafts have been closed and capped throughout the city. Structures have been removed. Mine operations that were located within residential neighborhoods have been cleaned away and developed into residential lots. Contaminated soils within residential areas have been remediated.

Residential areas have expanded over the decades and encompassed areas outside of the early settled area that were formerly mined. Remnant residential areas that had developed around mines that were further away now exist independently and have themselves grown after the mines have been removed. In some cases, odd configurations of open space, particularly in the western portion of the city, are a reminder of remaining waste sites. Abandoned railroad rights-of-way thread through the city showing the network that once existed. Large moonscape areas devoid of vegetation and with mountains of chat are located northwest, just outside the city boundaries.

Using the Sanborn maps from the early twentieth century Joplin's mining landscape could be studied in detail and interpreted. A long-term project of superimposing mine structures shown in the Sanborn maps into the city's GIS database would portray the physical layout of mining infrastructure across the city's landscape. Research into the individual operations would provide a detailed picture of how operations within the city evolved. How subsequent development occurred after mining ceased would be of interest.

Commercial Center of the Tri-State Mining District

In response to the influx of miners in 1871, John Cox platted seventeen acres for a town site on the hill on the east side of Joplin Creek centered at about today's Broadway and Cox Streets. He later platted an additional twenty-three acres for the town. On the west side of the creek, investors purchased forty acres of land from Oliver Picher and filed a plat for a new town centered at about today's 4th and Main Streets.

The two towns grew rapidly. On the west side, lead investors Patrick Murphy and William Davis built a miners supply store at 1st and Main Streets and, shortly after, a smelter. Lots were sold on liberal terms. Whereas John Cox sold land to others to develop, Murphy and Davis were themselves aggressive entrepreneurs. It was the west side of creek that would become the commercial center of the new community once the two towns were finally unified with the name of Joplin in 1873 (Renner 26-27).

By 1875, fifty-two mercantile establishments had already opened in the young city. A gas system with gas produced from coal was installed in 1877 for street lighting and houses. Joplin grew rapidly in the 1880s. A public water system pumping water from Shoal Creek four miles to the south was completed in 1881, the same year that telephones were introduced. The first street trolley, pulled by mules, was introduced in 1882. The first electric generating plant was built in 1887. That year, citizens voted in favor of becoming a third-class city, which opened the way for additional civic improvements such as street paving and the construction of sewer lines (Renner 1985:32-34).

Joplin experienced its most rapid growth between 1890 and 1910. The city's population in 1890 was 9,943 compared to about 2,000 in 1872. By 1900, Joplin's population was 26,023, and by 1910 it was 32,073. Joplin had grown from a remote mining camp to a significant city in less than thirty years (Renner 1885:37,40,46).

With this growth, Joplin emerged as the hub and leading city of the Tri-State Mining District. Reasons for its leading role include the development of significant railroad connections, dominance in the manufacturing of mining machinery, and importance in the financing and administration of mining. Located within a ten-mile radius of Joplin were eleven towns with an aggregate population of 80,000 by 1910. These towns became tied to Joplin by roads, railroads, and an extensive electric trolley system (Renner 1985:37,46).

By 1910, development of Joplin's railroad network was complete. The city's several railroads collaborated in the construction of Union Station in 1911. The

Frisco Railroad, however, did not participate and instead constructed its own eight-story depot and office at 6th and Main Streets in 1913, Joplin's first high-rise building, which still remains (Renner 1985:55).

As the region's railroad hub, the city became a center for warehousing, wholesale distribution, and factories. An important factor in Joplin's dominance of mining was its growing role in the manufacturing of mining machinery. The low-grade, scattered ore deposits characteristic of mines within the region stimulated the development of specialized machines that were invented and perfected locally. Many of these highly specialized machines that were designed, patented, and produced by Joplin firms then enjoyed a world-wide market (Renner 1985:39,55,57). Joplin's manufacturing industry lasted well into the twentieth century and was a factor in the city's economic transformation after the mining era ended.



Main Street in 1919 at the peak of its development; this is a featured photograph in The Joplin Globe's 2014 publication, *Joplin Memories, The Early Years*.

In the two decades between 1910 and 1930 Joplin's growth slowed, but expansion of the area's interurban trolley system and construction of a modern highway network continued to strengthen the city's central role within the region. As growth slowed and mining shifted away from Joplin's immediate environs, the city's population and economic base underwent a transformation into that of a more mature and urbanized center. The shift away from local mining caused the population to become less transitory and more stable, developing into a mix of trades people, laborers, merchants, and professionals (Renner 1985:49,59).

Ore production in the Joplin portion of the Tri-State District began to drop as early as 1906. However, discovery of the Picher field in nearby Oklahoma in 1914, the richest body of lead and zinc ever discovered within the District, increased regional production overall. District-wide production peaked in the years 1925 and 1926.

While no longer a center of production, Joplin maintained its role as the center of transportation, commerce, and manufacturing within the region. The city's businesses became more diversified and by 1925 included 141 manufacturing businesses as well as agriculture-related industries such as grain mills, feed processing plants, packing establishments, and creameries. Joplin's downtown shopping district included three large department stores as well as many smaller shops (Renner 1985:49,57). Linked throughout the region by the electric trolley system, Joplin was accessible to a large regional population. The trolley system peaked in use in 1918 before beginning its decline in the 1920s with the increased use of the automobile (Renner 1985:54).

As outlined above, Joplin grew from a mining town to a prominent city between 1871 and 1910. It then stabilized and matured over the next two decades. With the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929, the regional mining industry began to decline, its higher-grade lead and zinc deposits exhausted. The City of Joplin suffered under the Depression, but because of the increased diversity of its economy that had occurred since 1910, it fared better than other surrounding communities (Renner 1985:61). Joplin's challenge in the mid- and late-twentieth century was to complete the transformation of its economy away from mining to other sectors, which it was slowly able to accomplish.

Commercial and Industrial Resources

Joplin's rapid early twentieth century growth created an extensive downtown commercial and industrial core serving the entire Tri-State Mining District. Extending from the valley of Joplin Creek on the east nine blocks west to Byers Avenue and from 1st Street on the north to 10th Street on the south, Downtown Joplin was a regional center, considerably larger than the population of the city alone would normally support. This center is comprised of a rich variety of historic retail, office, institutional, industrial, warehouse, and residential buildings.

Geographically, Downtown Joplin is influenced by two primary factors. The valley of Joplin Creek serves as its eastern boundary and was the location of the first strike and initial mining activity in 1871 that led to the city's founding. Later, after the relatively shallow ore beds within the creek's bottomland were exhausted, the creek valley served as a natural location for the north-south railroad lines serving the city. Over time, this led to the predominance of industrial, manufacturing, and warehouse uses along the eastern side of downtown, where there was direct access to the railroads.

The other primary geographical factor was the north-south layout of Main Street on the heights west of the creek along with the grid of blocks and lots associated with it. Main Street became the primary commercial street in the city. While it started out in 1871 as a line of tents and shacks providing minimal accommodations for the initial businesses of the mining boom town, Main Street became fully developed as a regional urban center by 1910.

To the north, Main Street terminated about four blocks north of 1st Street at the steep bluff looking down over the diagonally trending creek. To the south, beyond the city's boundary, the extension of Main Street varied from the city's grid and wound its way down to Reddings Mill in the valley of Shoal Creek. Neither extension of Main Street was of transportation or economic significance. Main Street was thus an artificial creation intended solely as the town's commercial center.

The railroads and the electric trolley lines made Joplin into a regional center. Between 1878 and 1888 several railroads built lines connecting to Joplin. The 1910 map shows eight railroad lines radiating out from the city in all directions. While the valley of Joplin Creek became a primary north-south railroad corridor, the primary east-west corridor through the city was the rail yard at 10th Street, the de facto southern terminus of Downtown Joplin.

The railroads connected Joplin to the nation, and the electric trolley lines connected the communities of the Tri-State Mining District to Joplin. The first electric trolley line was introduced to Joplin in 1890, beginning the replacement of earlier mule-car lines. By 1907, an elaborate electric trolley system was in place that served most of the mining district. Approximately 90 percent of the system's business was miners, who could commute from their homes to mines located throughout the district. New residential suburbs were created along its routes. The system also linked smaller communities throughout the district to Downtown Joplin. As noted above, use of the trolley system peaked in 1918 and then declined through the 1920s as the automobile gained prominence (Renner 1985:52-54).

Joplin's railroads and trolley lines are lost historic landscape resources that had a significant impact on the physical development of the city. Traces of the trolley lines are almost entirely gone, though several roads and the layouts of some neighborhoods provide evidence of their existence.



Few remaining railroad-related buildings still exist in Joplin. The building at left is a rare remaining roundhouse.

Only a few active railroad lines remain in Joplin; most have been removed. However, the vacant rights-of-way of former lines are visible throughout the city, ghosts of the era of railroad dominance. Like Joplin's mining operations, which they served, these rights-of-way are elements of a lost landscape. Remaining resources include the rights-of-way themselves, spurs that served former mines and manufacturing operations, remnant infrastructure such as concrete culverts, and in some places metal rails under roads that have been paved over but cause cracking of pavement when they expand. Very few railroad-related buildings

remain along the railroad lines beyond downtown. Like those of the mining operations, most have been removed. Rights-of-way provide future locations for possible pedestrian trails throughout the city.



Remaining railroad infrastructure; most significant are the rights-of-way themselves. The steel rails of abandoned lines are still present beneath paved roads as in the center photograph here.

The structure of Downtown Joplin is comprised of three parts: (1) commercial uses along Main Street and some adjacent streets; (2) industrial, manufacturing, and warehouse uses to the east toward the railroad, and (3) predominantly institutional and residential uses to the west, blending into the surrounding neighborhoods.

A comprehensive survey of most of the downtown area was undertaken in 1988 and provides a valuable assessment of historic buildings existing at that time. Evaluations of buildings with respect to historic use and integrity were made which provide a basis for further assessment today. The 2008 Multiple Property Documentation Form for Joplin provides a framework for the evaluation of significance for historic buildings in Joplin in relation to the city's history and historic contexts. The 2008 study identifies historic building types to which most of Joplin's historic buildings relate.

Joplin has a wide range of historic commercial buildings along Main Street and on adjacent blocks. A significant number of historic buildings were lost to demolition during the period of urban renewal in the late 1950s into the 1970s. Downtown Joplin was fully developed by 1910 and continued to add new buildings into the 1920s. Commercial buildings along Main Street and on adjacent blocks range from older, traditional two- and three-story retail stores, high-rise offices and department stores, to later one-story automobile related businesses and showrooms.



Three of Downtown Joplin's prominent high-rise buildings; the center photograph is the eight-story Frisco Building at 6th and Main Streets constructed in 1913 to serve as a depot and offices for the Frisco Railroad.



Traditional two- and tree-story retail buildings in Downtown Joplin's commercial district



One-story commercial buildings like the two at the right date from the 1920s and are related to the increased use of the automobile. A number are found along South Main Street and on adjacent blocks. The building at right is the smallest on Main Street.

To the east of Main Street are many buildings used by businesses that needed access to the railroad lines in the valley of Joplin Creek. Many of these buildings are underutilized today and represent a long-term opportunity for revitalization and growth downtown. There are a significant number of open lots where buildings appear to have been lost as well, which provides an opportunity for new construction.



A range of manufacturing and industrial buildings on the east side of Downtown Joplin; the two buildings at right are immediately adjacent to the rail lines in the creek valley. The building at right is one block off of Main Street.



As a regional center, Joplin developed warehousing and wholesaling businesses that served the entire Tri-State Mining District. The three buildings above were all related to food distribution and are located immediately adjacent to the rail lines in Downtown Joplin. The building in the center has been rehabilitated and is a model project, noted in Chapter 3.

To the west of Main Street, the most prominent buildings were institutional in nature and represent the array of social entities that became established in larger communities. These buildings give way to residential neighborhoods to the west, north, and south. Included with them were a few large apartment buildings, unusual in a community known for its small miners' residences. These apartment buildings, other large buildings that could be rehabilitated, and additional open space that has resulted from demolition provide opportunities for residential development within the downtown core.



A Carnegie Library, a Masonic Temple, and a federal courthouse and post office are representative of the more prominent institutional uses located on the west side of Downtown Joplin. These are the community's most dignified and respected buildings.



Churches and schools, the centers of community life, are also located here. Churches located downtown were constructed by the denominations prevalent in the early twentieth century.



Large apartment buildings in and near Joplin's downtown core seem unusual in the community known for its neighborhoods of small homes. Yet they represent the city's historic role as a regional center and provide an opportunity for urban redevelopment.

Joplin's Neighborhoods

Joplin's residential neighborhoods spread outward from its downtown commercial core to the east, west, and south. The valley of Turkey Creek to the north acted as a barrier to easy expansion in that direction. With the rapid growth in population first in the 1870s and then between 1890 and 1910, land owners and investors took advantage of the persistent shortage of housing by platting new neighborhoods and selling lots. Numerous subdivisions were annexed into the city's boundaries in the twenty-year period ending in 1910 (Renner 1985:40).

Many of the early neighborhoods developed around active mines that were located close to the city center. As these mines played out in favor of richer ore beds further away, the large mining companies that controlled the land sold tracts to groups of investors who developed them as residential neighborhoods. The residential areas first grew westward, then southward. Small independent villages such as Blendville, a mile-and-a-half southwest of the city center, grew up around independent mining operations and were absorbed into the city. The Blendville area was annexed in 1892. By the early 1900s, real estate values were dramatically increasing as the city's rapid growth spread south across the open farmland.

The region's network of electric trolleys or streetcars, discussed above in its relation to Joplin's commercial connections within the Tri-State Mining District, linked the growing neighborhoods not only to the downtown center but also to other communities and mining operations throughout the district. As mining ended in the immediate vicinity of Joplin, miners living in the city could commute to other places for work. By 1930, most of the historic residential areas in Joplin that we know today were fully developed.

Joplin's residential neighborhoods are among the city's greatest assets. Today, the neighborhoods have matured into places of great charm. In part, this charm derives from the streetscapes of large deciduous canopy trees that shelter, shade, and provide scale to neighborhood residences. In part this charm also derives from the character of the residences themselves.

Joplin's residential neighborhoods are made up primarily of small homes in a great variety of different types and styles. Most neighborhoods were created to serve miners or related trades. Houses were small and affordable. Most were

wood-framed, though the scattering of small houses with stone exteriors is remarkable. Rarely are two side-by-side homes of the same type or style. Most of the houses are vernacular, but some very small houses were built in Tudor or other popular styles. Most have front porches, relating the homes to the streetscape. Alleyways in most early blocks service the homes from behind. Because the homes are small and mostly made of wood, they are easy to maintain. Today, these neighborhoods have great character and are attractive to special markets, such as young families, couples, singles, and empty nesters.

Joplin's 1990 Preservation Plan divided the core of the city into historic neighborhood areas that are useful in considering how the city expanded. The city's Neighborhood Services Division has identified functional neighborhoods within these historic areas that can be used for neighborhood engagement, planning, and revitalization (discussed in Chapter 6 of this plan).

To date, only two of Joplin's neighborhoods have been professionally surveyed with respect to historic preservation. The working class neighborhood in the southeast corner of Downtown Joplin was surveyed in 1988. The more affluent neighborhood of Murphysburg was surveyed in 2012. A portion of Murphysburg's surveyed area was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2015.

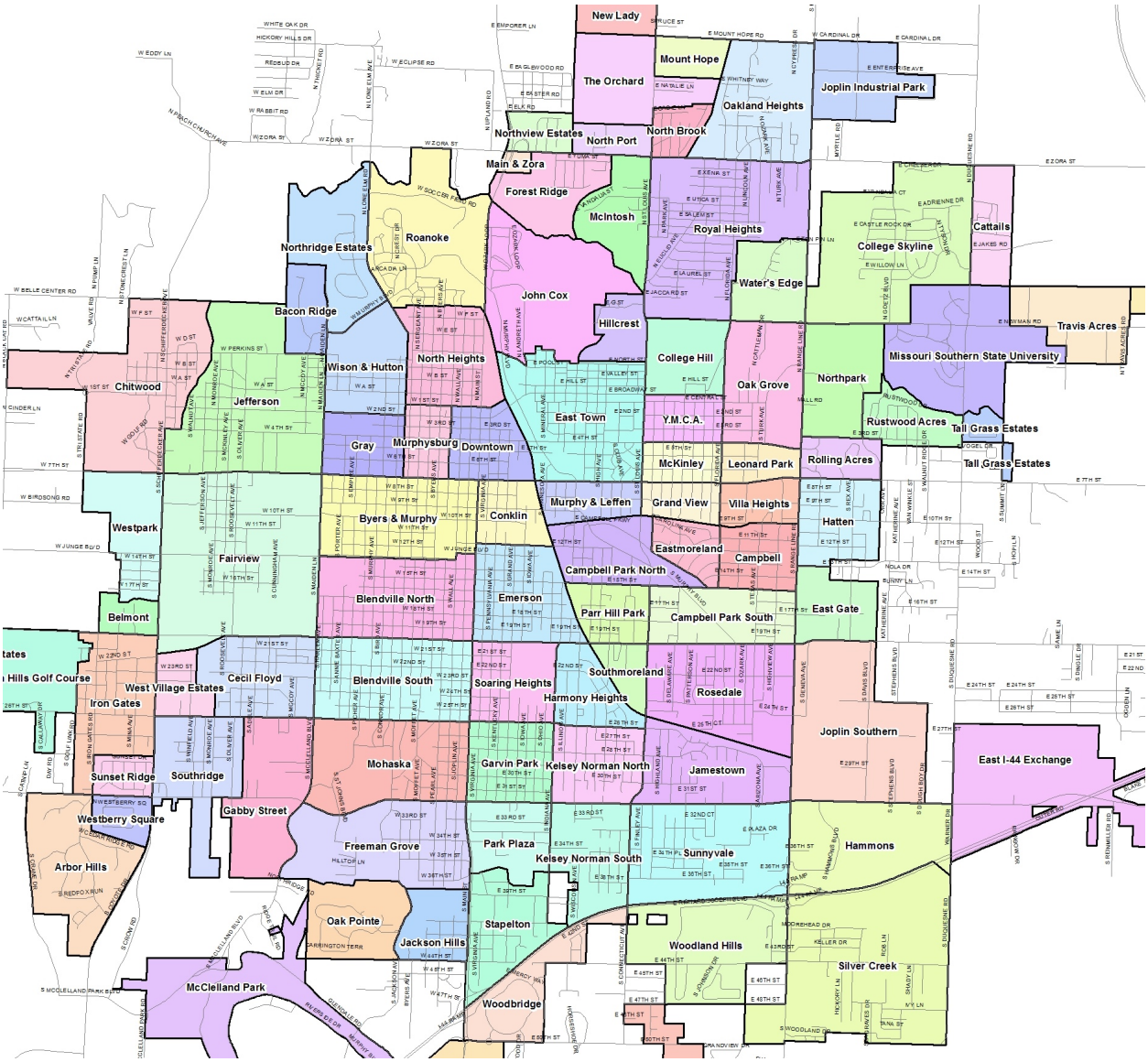
The long-term need to continue research and the survey of Joplin's residential neighborhoods is discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 of this plan. By studying the homes in existing neighborhoods, a better understanding of their history, development, and character can be obtained and can be used to support neighborhood engagement and revitalization.

The basis for the continued survey of neighborhoods is included in the 2008 Multiple Property Documentation Form prepared for Joplin (Schwenk 2008). This study includes a background summary of the city's growth and a discussion of the types of vernacular housing that make up most of Joplin's neighborhoods.

The historic neighborhood areas identified in the 1990 Preservation Plan include:

- Joplin City (today the East Town neighborhood);
- Murphysburg;
- North Heights;
- Roanoke;
- Blendville;
- South Joplin; and
- South Main Street.

Together, these areas include most of the city's historic neighborhoods that had developed by 1930. What they do not include are the neighborhood of Leonard Park that developed east of Joplin City (East Town), the trolley suburb of Royal Heights to the northeast, and the small mining neighborhoods of west Joplin that still survive. And of course, they do not include the suburban neighborhoods of the 1950s and 1960s, mostly to the south and southeast, that should now also be recognized for their distinctive character. The future detailed study of Joplin's neighborhoods envisioned by the Historic Preservation Commission and Neighborhood Services Division, discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, should include all of Joplin's neighborhoods.



Map of Joplin's neighborhoods with the historic neighborhood areas identified in the 1990 Preservation Plan superimposed.

Below are discussions of the historic neighborhood areas identified in the 1990 Preservation Plan with background on their history and character.

Joplin City (East Town)

Joplin City, located on the hilltop east of Joplin Creek, was the first settlement of Joplin and retains much of its original landscape character. Centered on Broadway Street, this area is known today as the East Town neighborhood. John Cox platted his new town in this location in 1871 soon after the discovery of a rich vein of lead ore on land he owned and leased to miners in the valley of Joplin Creek just to the west. The competing town of Murphysburg was being platted at the same time on the west side of the creek, and the two towns finally became joined as Joplin in 1873.

As the community west of the creek was growing faster with more business development, the Joplin City area remained predominantly residential. Perhaps because of its slow growth, the Joplin City area retains some of the best examples of construction from before and immediately after the Civil War. Its houses are predominantly wood frame, single story structures of early cottage and shot-gun styles. There are some stone and early brick buildings, most of which are of commercial or religious use.

Many of the area's commercial buildings are located along Broadway Street, which was one of the main roads into Joplin from the east and northeast. The Cox residence and cemetery are preserved in their original landscape setting to the north of the neighborhood.



Homes and a church in East Town, the original Joplin City

Throughout the early to mid-nineteenth century, as the neighborhoods in the northeast part of town declined due to suberbanization, African American presence in this area expanded, and the neighborhood became a center of Joplin's black community. As one of the first settlements of Joplin, this area contains remaining elements of the original community with churches, commercial properties, buildings associated with transportation, and city parks. Many buildings have been lost within this area, however, and a large number of vacant lots are available for future development (Casey/Hill 1990:15; Schwenk 2008:E-39,40).

Murphysburg

To the west of downtown is the residential neighborhood of Murphysburg. Named after the original town established west of Joplin Creek in 1871, this neighborhood was an extension of downtown and contained a mix of residences of different socio-economic groups dating from the boom years of the 1870s through well into the twentieth century.

The residences in the northern portion, particularly those bounded by West 1st and West 6th Streets north-south and Pearl and Jackson Streets east-west, were the homes of some of the city's prominent families, while the homes to the south housed the working class of Joplin. As the commercial downtown core spread west, many early houses close to downtown were demolished for institutional and commercial uses.

The Murphysburg neighborhood includes a broad mix of building styles and types related to its different economic groups. Many of the homes to the north are high style residences built by many of the prominent business leaders and families. Except for these few homes in Murphysburg, large high style residences are rare in Joplin. The homes to the south that housed working class families are predominantly vernacular and are more typical of Joplin.



High style residences in north Murphysburg's historic district above; workers' housing in the southern portion of the neighborhood below

Murphysburg is predominantly residential, mostly single family homes but also including a few multiple family residences. The homes vary in style from Queen Anne to vernacular with Foursquare, Two-door Miners' Cottages, and Bungalows mixed in. The historic integrity of the neighborhood is intact and very little modern construction or demolition has taken place.

Many of Joplin's founding families built homes in this area, and their wealth is reflected in the size and workmanship of the buildings, both the interior and exterior. The simplicity of the workers' housing reflects the stature and economic base of the majority of Joplin's residents (Casey/Hill 1990:23; Schwenk 2008:E-36).

The northern portion of the Murphysburg neighborhood has been listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places and is also a local historic district.

North Heights

The land north and west of 1st and Main Streets was open prairie land at the time of the city's founding. During the 1870s and 1880s, it was mined extensively by the Granby Mining and Smelting Company, one of the largest mining landholders in the district. In 1891, a large portion of the land was sold to the City of Joplin, which soon began developing it for residential use. The North Heights addition, north of C Street, was one of the first developed. The following year, the school district erected Columbia School at the corner of E Street and Moffet Avenue establishing a distinct neighborhood. The city's streetcar lines provided transportation to and from North Heights.

Over the ensuing two decades the North Heights residential district grew, bounded by F Street on the north, Main Street on the east, B Street on the south, and Gray Avenue on the west. The area contains many of the homes of the city's founding fathers as well as individuals prominent in the city at the turn-of-the-century. The area also contains the houses of the middle class and the city's earliest purpose-built apartment buildings.



Range of residential buildings and one former commercial building developed in North Heights

North Heights is predominantly residential, ranging from single family homes to multiple family apartments. The homes vary in style from Queen Anne to vernacular with Foursquare, Cottages, and Bungalows mixed in. The historic integrity of the neighborhood is intact and has little modern construction or demolition. There are some commercial and institutional uses in the area. Many of the houses are reasonably maintained, but some are in need of rehabilitation work (Simpson in Casey/Hill 1990:28; Schwenk 2008:37).

Roanoke

In 1907, the Granby Mining and Smelting Company sold forty acres adjacent to North Heights to the Roanoke Realty Company for residential subdivision. The developers envisioned that the rolling topography adjoining North Heights would be filled in with fine homes in a few years. Scoffers thought it would never work;

the topography was rough, and its streets were too steep. In addition, the lots were being offered at $1000 each, an exorbitant amount at that time, and carried restrictions as to their use.

In spite of the naysayers, the Roanoke neighborhood quickly developed into an attractive subdivision for new, high style homes. The winding streets and varying lots are fine examples of the type of City Beautiful urban subdivision design being introduced in other large cities around the country. Located on the bluffs above Turkey Creek, the rolling topography and inaccessibility provided natural beauty, privacy, and exclusivity.

Often called "Snob Hill," Roanoke is the most concentrated neighborhood of high style housing in the city. Many different styles popular in the early twentieth century are represented: Tudor, Spanish, Colonial, Neoclassical, Bungalow, Shingle, Prairie, and others. The Roanoke neighborhood continued to be developed into the 1920s and 1930s. The homes in this area have been well maintained.



Affluent homes in the Roanoke neighborhood on the bluffs above Turkey Creek

The later Roanoke Crest subdivision continues to the north with Sergeant Avenue becoming Crestwood Drive. Some of the homes along this drive and to the west were built in the late 1930s. Others were built in the mid- and late-twentieth century (Simpson in Casey/Hill 1990:32).

Blendville

Blendville was an unincorporated mining community that sprang up in 1876 about a mile and a half southwest of the city center after several mines opened in the area. Blendville was typical of the small mining settlements that developed around Joplin, as miners clustered their homes around the mines where they worked. The village, originally called Cox Diggings, occupied 160 acres that today is bounded on the west by Maiden Lane and spreads southward from 20th Street to 26th Street. In 1880, the village was renamed Blendeville—blende is the common name for the zinc sulfide ore that was mined in the area. The "e" was later dropped from the name.

An important pioneer citizen, Thomas W. Cunningham, owned a 40-acre farm that became the nucleus of the residential section of Blendville. He laid out the farm into town lots and priced them low enough that miners could afford to buy them. He also donated lots for three churches and a school. In 1898, he donated a large piece of wooded land at 28th and Maiden Lane to the city for the city's first

park, Cunningham Park. Blendville was mostly residential and occupied by miners who worked in the nearby mines.

Many of the area's commercial buildings are gone, but a few plain brick structures remain. The city's Water Works Department, built in 1881, is located here. Its red brick buildings are ornamented with arched windows, a tower, and cut stonework. The area surrounding the Water Works is historically significant to Joplin because of its role in the rapid development of the city.



Views of the Blendville neighborhood around Cunningham Park, destroyed by the 2011 tornado

The 2011 tornado that struck Joplin ripped through the southern portion of Blendville and destroyed most of the homes south of 23rd Street. Most of the homes north of 23rd Street survived intact. These homes consist mostly of simple frame cottages, with some more ornate Victorian styles as well as Foursquares and Bungalows. The majority of surviving buildings are in good condition, although some are in need of maintenance and repair (Casey/Hill 1990:36).

South Joplin

South Joplin encompasses a narrow band extending from the 10th Street rail yards east of Main Street south to the rolling hills west of Main Street at 36th Street. As the city limits of Joplin grew southward from the early 1900s through the 1930s, a number of residential subdivisions of farmland occurred both before and after annexation. In 1900, the Missouri Lead and Zinc Company laid out a parcel of land for 350 shotgun houses between Missouri Avenue and the railroad to the east (Renner 1985:38).

John C. Cox Jr., son of Joplin founder John C. Cox, was one of the early residents of the area and owned a large farm and a house which stood at the intersection of 16th Street and Joplin Avenue. Cox and other landowners parceled off lots for development. The area was annexed as Cox's Addition to meet the city's critical need for new housing.



Appealing vernacular and styled housing in the northern portion of South Joplin, east of Main Street

In 1906, a popular ballpark with its grandstand and bleachers at 16th and Main Streets was demolished to make way for commercial and residential lots. The demand for these lots was so great that their value rose from $200 in 1908 to anywhere from $350 to $1550 by the end of the year.

The early twentieth century homes developed in the northern part of this area are typical of the small, wood-framed dwellings found elsewhere in Joplin. These homes vary in style from simple Queen Ann to many forms of vernacular. Houses at the south end were developed in the 1920s and 1930s and, though small, include English Cottage and Tudor styles, Spanish Mission, Colonial Revival, Bungalows, and American Foursquare. The later neighborhoods on the rolling hills south of 32nd Street are particularly appealing.



Highly styled but small homes from the 1920s and 1930s in the southern portion of Oak Ridge in South Joplin

The 2011 tornado severely impacted South Joplin, cutting directly though it and destroying most homes between 20th and 23rd Streets to the north and 28th Street to the south. The majority of surviving buildings both north and south of the tornado destruction are in good condition and are well maintained. Older houses closer to the rail yards in the northern portion of South Joplin are more likely to be in need of appropriate maintenance (Simpson in Casey/Hill 1990:40; Schwenk 2008:E-38).

The South Main Street Corridor

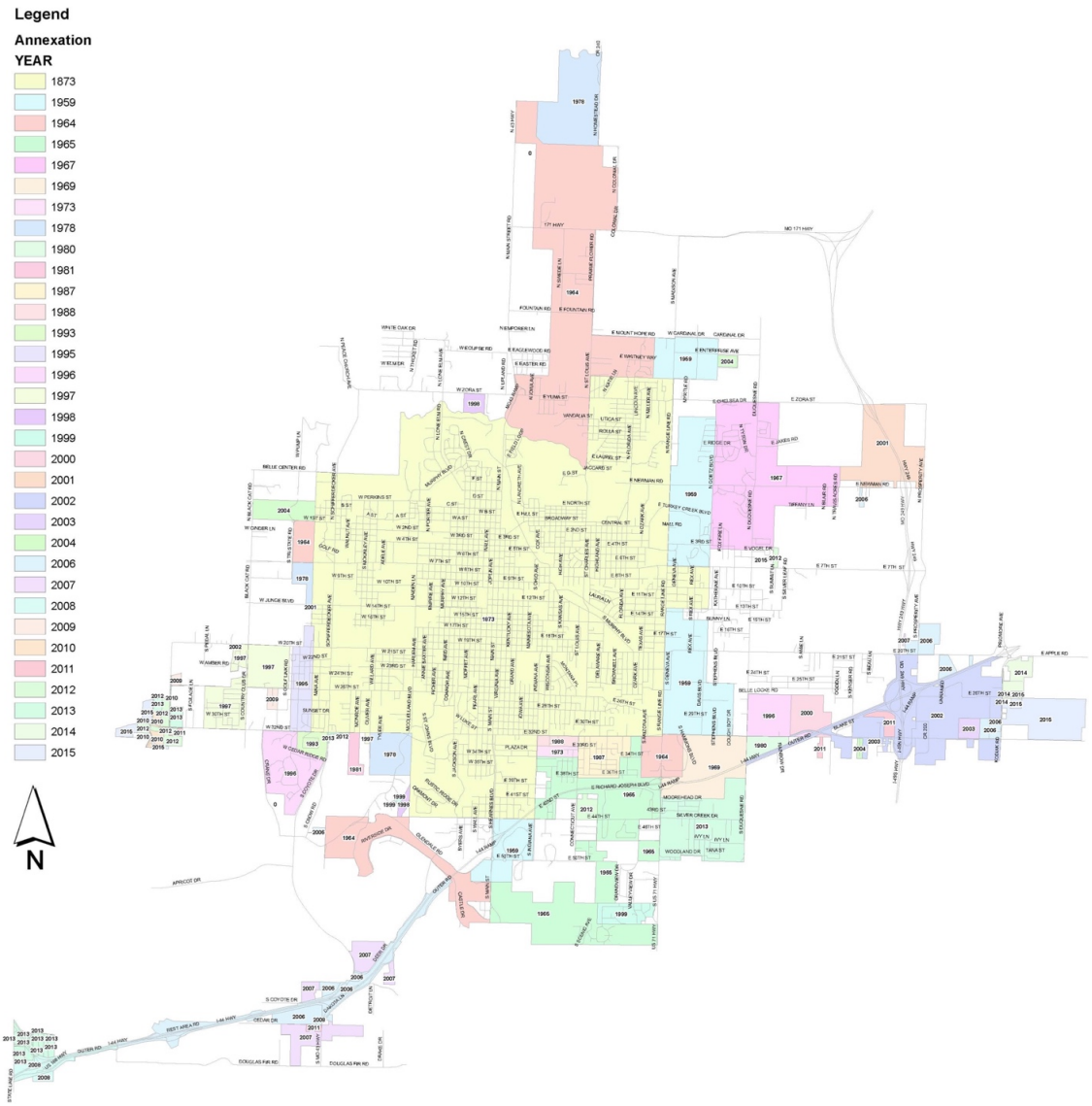
The South Main Street Corridor identified in the 1990 Preservation Plan extends from 10th Street to 26th Street; historic buildings can be found further south as well. 1906 was the pivotal year for Joplin's development southward from the city's downtown core.



View south down Main Street above the tornado damage (left); view north from 29th Street showing new commercial redevelopment within the area of tornado damage (center); surviving stone residence along Main Street at 29th Street (right).

That year the city spent $15,000 to extend Main Street four miles south to Reddings Mill on Shoal Creek, resulting in one of the state's longest main streets. Fifteen new additions were annexed into the city, many of which were in South Joplin. Real estate values increased 100% that year. Prices for lots on Main Street were highest due to their commercial value.

Many of the commercial buildings on Main Street south of 10th Street represent styles and types that were prominent throughout the nation from the 1880s to the 1940s and to the present. The 2011 tornado destroyed buildings along Main Street in an area bounded by 20th Street to the north through 29th Street to the south. Above 20th Street, the character and integrity of the commercial district remains intact. Below 20th Street new commercial and mixed-use development is being encouraged. A few one story stone residences along Main Street in the vicinity of 29th Street survived (Simpson in Casey/Hill 1990:44).



Annexation map of Joplin showing the city of the early twentieth century in yellow and additions that have been made since 1959 (City of Joplin; the date 1873 in the legend is incorrect)