Michael Wagaman
April 13, 2004
Dr. Richardson
POL. 380
The Globalization of Topton

Globalization is a common term heard often when referring to the taking over of small towns by larger corporations. In essence, it is turning everything into a global sphere and taking away the precious sense of community with which so many generations grew up. Globalization is exactly what has taken place in the small town of Topton, Pennsylvania. Topton was never a thriving metropolis, but it was at one point much more self-sufficient and the picturesque small town where everyone worked and lived. However, today Topton tells a different story. All but a few of the small businesses and industry that used to be in the area have left and been replaced by house upon house in newly built developments. Yes, there is still a small community, but it is not the Topton that existed before the powerful effects of globalization were felt.

Perhaps, the first step in understanding what it is that happened to Topton is to look at globalization more carefully. It is certainly a topic that has received mixed feelings among political analysts. Some believe that it is a truly beneficial happening and certainly one that cannot and should not be stopped. Thomas L. Friedman, in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, writes, “America does have a shared national interest to pursue in today’s globalization system – one that constitutes both a big opportunity and a big responsibility. Put simply: As the country that benefits most from today’s global integration …it is our job to make sure that globalization is sustainable” (Friedman 437). Not only does Friedman argue for the benefits of globalization, he continues with how it can be continued with methods in the political realm and certain “safety nets” the country needs to put in place to ensure the continued success (Friedman 438-441). As one can
guess, Friedman is quick to point out the benefits of a more global nation and communities, but globalization, as many know it, is not a positive feature that makes life easier for them and their families. In fact, it is the opposite. To them it appears as an unstoppable force that simply destroys their community, as it did in Topton. This view is supported by Naomi Klein who discusses the less than positive effects of globalization in her book *No Logo*. With section headed “No Space”, “No Choice”, and “No Jobs” it is not surprising that she writes about the deplorable conditions of sweat shops there to sew name brand labels into the clothes of the members of the global community. To Klein, globalization did at a point create an “excitement,” but now as the “manic renditions of [it] wear thin, [to] reveal the cracks and fissures beneath its high gloss façade” we as people should not be so enthralled with its takeover (Klein xv-xix). Now it is simply creating a place where the “economic divide is widening and cultural choices narrowing” (Klein xix). Globalization has created a place where some live in excessive riches, while others are barely able to survive on the small wages they receive for making the name brand clothing outfitting the rich and powerful. This is globalization at its worst.

However, in Topton globalization presents a slightly different picture than that painted by either Friedman or Klein in their books. Instead, Topton shows the effects of the global takeover on a small town scale. At one point in its history Topton was a small town supported by its own businesses before it was reached by global networking. It was “the kind of a town / On which you could put your “O. K.”” The poem these lines were taken from continues with a summary of just what could be found in Topton pre-globalization:

Here’s contentment and health; quite a few have found wealth.
Then of course we’ve some knockers – a few;
But the good ones here will give you cheer;
Dwell with us and be happy, too. (A.H.S., Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 19)

Clearly, Topton was the kind of town where one would want to live and raise a family.

Topton boasted this small town atmosphere from its founding in 1876 until about the 1980’s at which point Topton was no longer the town that most of its inhabitants remembered. The first aspect of Topton that gave it its small town feeling was the school system. The schools of Topton began back in 1876 when a settlement for the school property was made with the Longswamp School Board. Then on August 18, 1882 a plot of ground that was adjacent to the small plot received in the earlier transaction was purchased from the Reuben Fenstermacher estate for $99.87. Numerous plots of land continued to be purchased in the coming years, one for $100.00 on October 30, 1883 and another $100.00 purchase followed that year. The land was gotten ready by tearing down the old frame buildings that existed on the purchased land. The lumber from these buildings was re-sold to build houses within the area. This was the beginning of the small school that would be the Topton School District (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 30).

Topton’s start at a school house began later that same year with a two-story, four room brick building becoming the first erected on the new plots now owned by the Topton School District. The school was used for grades one through eight. The next step in the school building process was to acquire some land for a playground for the children and that was done on December 6, 1912 when 65 hundredths of an acre was purchased from Ellen Reeser for the sum of $800.00. By 1920 the number of children in the small
schoolhouse was increasing and more room was needed, so the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades were moved to the Lodge building on the corner of High and Cherry Street. The next step came for the district in 1924 with the purchase of another plot of land from Jacob Wisler for $500.00 where the old brick building was remodeled becoming the wing for grades six, seven, and eight. Additional land was purchased in 1926 for $530.00 to erect a space for those in tenth grade (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 30). The multiple buildings were finally joined and the Topton School system stood for all members of the community.

The first renovation project occurred in 1937 when it was decided that the school was getting too crowded. Additional room was provided in the left wing for a library, laboratory, and toilet facilities. However, the building was not perfect for it lacked an auditorium and adequate gymnasium (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 30). By 1949 talk began on the possibility of forming a joint school system. This would be a large, but important step closely regulated by many federal and state agencies. The first obstacle the town had to overcome was the problem of the number of students. The state specified that there needed to be 1200 students in the district, but the Topton area had only 1167. The problem was solved and on July 1, 1954 the Brandywine Heights Joint School System became functional (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 26-27). The district was scattered with secondary pupils in the former Topton Junior High School along with multiple church rooms throughout the area. However, “all pupils had equal or better educational opportunities than they had prior to the reorganization” (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 27). Unfortunately, this redistricting was not enough and more needed to be done to ensure enough room was available for all the children. On February 27, 1957 the
The keys to the new high school were ready. The most amazing thing about this new high school was its location. It was built on donated land from Caloric Corporation, a major business in Topton at the time. This is clearly an example of the tremendous sense of community shared by the people of Topton (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 27). Not only is this act of Caloric important in illustrating the sense of community Topton boasted, the multiple land purchases at low prices also shows just how far the member of the community were willing to go to help educate their children and build a better place to live.

A town post-globalization would have a hard time finding itself able to build a school on donated land from a major corporation or even purchase land from local owners. This is what happened in Topton today. After some time, it was decided that the school built on the land from Caloric would need to be enlarged and renovations took place. However by 2001 it was known that the current school was becoming more and more insufficient. Plans for a new school were developed and talk about where to build the school began. However, there was the problem of where to possibly build the large new high school that was necessary. There were not any community members willing to sell their land nor were there any large corporations to donate the land. Finally, the school was able to purchase some farmland that at one point had been a minefield and a dumping ground for Caloric. Obviously, this was not the first choice for a school building, but what could a small town suffering from the effects of globalization do?

The next and perhaps most important aspect to understanding the small town feel of Topton, is to look at the industry and small businesses that were scattered amongst the
town through the earlier years. It was these small business and industries that fostered such a sense of community that was clearly evident at the time.

One important influence on Topton was the large industry it boasted. Not only were these numerous factories jobs for the local “Toptonites,” they were also a source of commerce that kept the town thriving for many years. One of the more prominent factories was that of Weil’s homemade potato chips. Weil’s business began from his garage in 1930. Mr. Weil used a coal-fired kettle to make the chips in the evening when he returned from his full time job. His daughters were responsible for peeling the potatoes in the afternoon when they got home from school. The operation soon changed when a near disastrous fire occurred in the home causing the Weil’s to relocate their chip making business (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 51). This factory was developed in 1940 on the corners of Spruce and Broad streets where it used an automatic chip machine to make its “Dutch treat”. By 1941, the product was so popular that Mr. Weil had to purchase a truck to make deliveries and by 1951 he was using three trucks to service his customers (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 77). The contribution of the chip factory to the small town can be seen in the story told by Carl Greiss, a long time resident of Topton. He remembered how he and his friends used to pass the factory on their way home from school and stop in for an afternoon snack. They were always welcomed and given bags of freshly made chips unsealed so that they were overflowing. Clearly this was one of his more favorite activities.

Wert’s Beverages was another example of a thriving industry contributing to Topton’s small town vibe. It began in 1938, but rapidly spread and by 1949 a modern two-story building was erected to hold the latest bottling equipment. The next expansion
came in 1950 with the addition of a beer distributor and then again in 1951 when an “ultra modern washing machine was installed” (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 85). Wert’s is, perhaps, one of the only businesses that has been able to withstand globalization as is seen by the fact that it still remains in Topton today. This is only because of its namesake “Wert’s Birchbeer” that is common to many, even directly outside of the Topton area.

Clearly, chips and beverages were important to the members of the Topton community, but there were other needs that were met by a flourmill, bakery, and candy factory. These factories all of course provided some source of food, but they too were important in creating the sense of togetherness Topton had. The Topton Roller Flour Mill was one of the older industries in Topton. The mill was first built in Rockland Township, but was destroyed by a fire in April of 1885. The Rohrbach brothers then petitioned to open a site in “down town” Topton. They were able to erect a new Flour Mill in Topton on East Franklin Street. The Mill became functional in October of 1885. Numerous takeovers and changes of hands took place as the company spread, but it still remained one of Topton’s earliest brands of flour. Eventually the business was expanded and included commercial feed and coal (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 60). The Bakery of Topton was owned by Reuben Fenstermacher and was a one and a half story frame structure that faced Spruce Street from the corners of Spruce and Franklin Street. The bakery was operated with an annex and steam oven and included three rural routes that covered about 20 miles (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 86). In addition to creating the baked goods for the area, the bakery also opened its doors to the residents of Topton for special occasions. Only in a small town without globalization could its members take
their Thanksgiving turkeys to the large oven to be cooked, freeing their homes up for additional preparations (Carl Greiss). Finally, there was the candy factory, which occupied the building that once housed the underwear factory of Topton, but other than that there is not much known about this small industry.

The General Seating Company was another of Topton’s industries. It began in California and was moved to Topton’s Home Avenue in 1936 where it remained until 1942. In 1942 it became the General Seating and Transportation Sash. After numerous liquidations and takeovers, in 1973 it became the newly named General Seating and Sash Company and its main products were seats for trucks, street cars, subway cars, high speed trains and busses, and sash for the same types of vehicles (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 42). The plant at the time had around 150 employees and was known for installing the first telephone in Topton, an obvious step in bringing the community closer, communication (“A Historical Tour of Topton”).

Along with the Seating manufacturer there were also factories that were helpful to those buying, selling, or remodeling their home. One of these such industries were Collins Rug Mill, which was famous for its “fancy rug weaving” and it was also the employer of 150 people in the area (“A Historic Tour of Topton”). There were also two furniture companies located in the area. The first is J.J. Schofer and Son, which began around 1900 when Jacob Schofer moved to Topton. This furniture store was not quite successful and was turned into Topton’s first Funeral Home (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 50). The other furniture company in Topton was DeLong Furniture Company, which was started in 1872 by a young Tilghman DeLong. Everything in the “factory” was made by hand and his business also expanded into casket making. The need for an actual factory
was realized and his line of church furniture became known all throughout eastern Pennsylvania, parts of New York, and most of New Jersey (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 61). It is this industry site that eventually turned into the Sash Company mentioned earlier.

The next business was one that helped Topton thrive and also one that can be helpful in introducing globalization into the town in both a positive and negative manner. This business was the Creamery and Ice House, which was crucial to any small town getting started in the late 1800’s. This company operated between 1882 and 1900 from the location of Hass and Railroad streets. Here butter was made and sold along with the daily supply of cream needed throughout the community. This butter was sold for 12 cents a pound and the cream was also turned into ice cream for numerous picnics in the area. This building also became the first icehouse where ice was taken from a damn located besides the building (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 67). Of course, the Creamery and Ice House were fast put out of business by the newly developed modern appliances that were bound to sweep through the area. However, although this was equated with progress, and in turn globalization, it cannot be considered simply negative. Modern day appliances were a result of globalization, but also an improvement that gave people more of the time they needed and also introduced one of the major contributors to Topton’s sense of community, Caloric Corporation.

Caloric Corporation was possibly one of the largest contributors to Topton’s economy and its people. It originated in Philadelphia in 1889 when Samuel Klein, its founder established Klein Stove Works. At this time its primary products were gas, oil, wood, and coal burning stoves that were made almost entirely of cast iron. They were
truly monstrosities and weighed somewhere between 600 and 700 pounds. Luckily progress intervened and Klein and company were able to slim down these early stoves. Klein moved his company to Berks County because he was in need of cast iron and Berks was known for its several foundries including the Topton Foundry and Machine Company, which was established in 1903 (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 42). The two became somewhat of a partnership and the newly name Caloric became a major industry in Topton.

In 1976, Caloric boasted 600,000 square feet of floor space spread out in ten buildings located on a 200 acre plot of land in Topton. It employed approximately 1300 people from mostly Topton and Berks County. The payroll of the company was more than 8 million dollars annually and it also became a major contributor to local charities, such as education in which they donated the land to build a new high school, church, and civic projects (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 42)

Aside from its numerous charitable donations, Caloric also had numerous other aspects that made it truly a small town company before the effects of globalization. Although it was a large industry it did not thrive on only making money through the selling of its products. Between the years of 1941 and 1945, it converted its assembly lines in order to help make products for the Armed Forces. The products it produced included Army field ranges and heaters, ammunition trays, cartridge chutes, metal radio cabinets (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 42). Caloric also became “recognized as the most experienced manufacturer of gas ranges in the United States” (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 42). It was estimated at the time that three million homes in the United States
had Caloric products in them with more than 60 models of ranges along with dishwashers, disposers, outdoor gas grilles, and other kitchen accessories.

Astoundingly, Caloric became a major business that also shipped to Central and South American, Australia, Republic of China, Iran and the Soviet Union, but it did not forget about its community members just as it did not forget its soldiers during the war (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 43). This was demonstrated in the Caloric Clipping, a local printout “published by and for the Employees of Caloric Appliance Corporation, Topton, Pennsylvania” (Caloric Clipping 2). It was a monthly printout that informed the local community about its members who were also employed by the company. There were articles about promotions and sales, along with small obituary like printings of its employees who died. In the January 1961 issue there is also a small editorial with a page of pictures about the members of the community who were all invited to see the new buildings. In the story the management thanks those who took the time to come visit the plant and “appreciate the most cooperative manner in which you conducted your families, considering the length of the trip and the amount of miles traveled in the tour” (Caloric Clipping 2). This story and the newspaper itself demonstrated just how much the community and the corporation were intertwined. They both depended on one another for jobs, support, and finances as Topton grew and expanded. In fact, at this point Topton was growing more than the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that Topton grew 108 percent in the years following the establishment of Caloric while the United States only grew 95 percent (The National Bank of Topton). Unfortunately, this could not last forever and by 1980 Caloric had decided to relocate to the Southern United States where the non-union labor was cheaper. Although the move may not have caused
the loss of community felt in Topton soon after that, it certainly is a prime example of globalization reaching into the small community. Caloric moved in an attempt to keep profits up in a world that was becoming more and more globalized. This move to the south was probably only the first step in the process of globalization but an important one. The move allowed Reytheon, the parent company, to become a major contributor of military technology for the government. According to Klein, the next move for the company would certainly be over seas where labor will be even cheaper. This is globalization at its height.

In addition to Caloric, Topton also had an additional high contributor to it manufacturing with Electro-Space Fabricators Incorporated. This company began in 1961 when Brooke E. Gernert decided that he was going to leave his company of Plantronics and start his own sheet-metal fabrication business. He joined with William J. Straccia and found a place to start their company in Topton. By the 1962 the company had begun. Within a few years the sales slowly increased and the company was expanded to 27 people. By 1968 the company was too large to be contained in its originally purchased land and built a 12,000 square foot addition at the location, rather than move the company (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 44). This was truly a positive for the atmosphere that Topton offered the company. Electro-Space continued to grow and service many people. It became the only supplier to General Electric for their television cameras that were used by ABC studios. Their product was also used in the television cameras that broadcast the 1968 Olympic Games. Finally, the products of Electro-Space were used in some of the early space flight undergone by NASA (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 62).
Not only was the company of Electro-Space crucial to many people all over; it was also an important part of the Topton community. It had over 100 employees with sales reaching $2.3 million in 1975. In addition, it offered many of the same services to the community as Caloric did. It too had an open house for the public in 1975, in which about 3,000 people toured the facility (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 45). This once again showed that the big businesses in Topton not only served as industries, but also served as a place where the community could get together and learn more and more about themselves and their home town. This is certainly an aspect that Topton today lacks. Not only are there hardly any businesses in the area, those that are present would never open their doors to the public, which is certainly a result of globalization.

Although these industries are not an exhaustive list of those present in Topton, they certainly provide an overview of industrial Topton. There were also industries and businesses, such as a butcher, an underwear manufacturer, a cigar company, a silk mill, a knitting mill, and a brickyard. However, industry was not the only crucial part of Topton pre-globalization. In addition and perhaps even more importantly were the small town businesses. For although the industries provided mass amounts of jobs, it is the smaller businesses that everyone always turned too and played a role in the communication and creation of a truly small town.

The businesses included such things as a hardware store, a tinsmith, and of course hotels to house the incoming visitors. However there were also numerous businesses that deserve a closer look. The first of these would be the necessary businesses for survival in any small town; the “5 & 10,” the grocery stores, and the drug stores. The first of these, Smith’s 5 & 10 Cent Store was opened in 1936 on the corner of Home Avenue and
Franklin Street. Their specialties included a soda fountain, candy and novelties, and acting as the agent for the Allen Laundry Company of Allentown. It was a small store run by Mr. Smith and his wife who were later accompanied by their daughter (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 69). This was truly a family endeavor and one that fostered the familial and communal attitude of the area. The second business would be the grocery stores located in the area. These included the Keystone Store and the American Store, both of which were found located within the community (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 66,71). The grocery stores were important in fostering the sense of community in two ways. First, they provided the necessary place for people to go and still remain within the community, but also they too contributed to the friendly atmosphere experienced by so many. This is exemplified in a story told by Larry Werst, the long time Mayor of Topton. He said that the employees of the grocery store, such as the clerks, deliverers, and shelf stockers, would be given lunch by the owner of the store. As a kid and employee, he said that this was one of the great perks of working in the community at the local grocery store (Larry Werst). It would be hard to find any store post-globalization that maintains this small town atmosphere and also feeds its employees in addition to paying them.

The final necessity as mentioned earlier was the Drug Store. A drug store is of course crucial to most people, but having one within walking distance made quite a difference in fostering a sense of community. Smith’s Pharmacy served Topton for over 25 years by stocking its shelves with the “latest and best prescription chemicals and proprietary items and sundry items and a friendly and efficient force of clerks to serve you” (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 72). This store was also owned and operated by a local family and was certainly a place that any member of the community could have
easily accessed and one where no one was rejected as in modern day, “globalized”
chains.

In addition to the necessary small town businesses, Topton also contained some others, such as clothing retailers, a jewelry store, and a blacksmith. All of which are certainly not necessary in a small town, but important in adding to the small town feelings. All of these stores meant that people never had to leave the community and could always count on their neighbors and friends for everything they needed from day to day.

Of the clothing retailers, Nolan’s Department Store was one of the more prominent. It is located at 33 East Franklin Street and contained infant’s, children’s, lady’s, and men’s clothes all within its walls. The store was once again owned by a family and opened its doors to the Topton community in 1949 (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 85). It is still in business today, but has suffered the effects of globalization. It now only survives because of the “prom season” and the occasional wedding party in need of a classic tuxedo that send business its way. The jewelry store in Topton began in 1913 when Edwin Morgan began his Watch Sales and Repair Service out of his own home on Home Avenue and Smith Street. The business expanded, as most of Topton’s businesses, and was moved to a store located on the south side of his current residence. This business too changed hands throughout its life, but only to keep it going when one owner died (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 71). It is clear that Topton and its members wanted to keep the small town feeling alive they had grown to know and love. Finally, there was the blacksmith shop, which began around 1889 or 1890. When the business was started on Home Avenue it was at the time of horses and carriages, so that there were many
horses to be shoed. This business not only provided easy access to blacksmith necessities it also fostered the community in the way it provided jobs for the younger sector. They could be expected to work the lever that controlled the bellows that helped to keep the fire red hot for the older blacksmiths as they molded the shoes. They also had to “shoo the flies” from the horses back legs as they were being fit for their newly formed shoes (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 89). These were stories told by the author of this book, whose father was the blacksmith in Topton, and truly create the picture of the small town atmosphere were everyone in the family was expected to help.

Not only did the numerous small businesses provide the people with the opportunity to stay in their own community, they also provided a large sphere in which the people could interact. This was truly evident in the baseball games played between the business and their employees. On their lunch breaks the different businesses would have baseball games. They would each be able to play on a different day and scores would be kept for an average of three innings. Not only was score kept on each individual game, the wins and losses were tallied for every business that participated in the event. This activity took a great deal of cooperation on behalf of the businesses, their employees, the owners of the field, and the community in general. Without a small town atmosphere, baseball on one’s lunch break would not be possible. In addition, a town post-globalization would most likely not want to interact with the surrounding businesses all the time.

The kids of the community also took the time to get involved with the businesses and their activities. Lillian Wagaman tells the story of how she and girlfriends would get together and make homemade candy, such as fudge and taffy. They would then set up a
stand to sell the candy to the workers as they left for the day (Lillian Wagaman). They were the classic small town entrepreneurs who certainly would not be seen today. This example shows how the children of a pre-globalized town were able to easily and comfortably interact with the adults in their community.

Finally, the last part of creating the sense of community in Topton that would be destroyed by globalization is the entertainment sector. There has already been some mention of this with the baseball games played among the businesses, but Topton also contained actual entertainment venues that further enabled its inhabitants to stay close to home. Two of the most important of these sites were the movie theatre and the bowling alley. The Palace Theatre became an important part of Topton in 1937 when its owners Mac and Leon Korr set out “to make the Palace Theatre equal to any deluxe theatre in the country” (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 88). They were able to install a new sound booth with the highest quality RCA sound available and projection equipment that showed a picture on the screen “equal to the best theatres” (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 88). Later they installed new, more comfortable seats. It was open on Wednesdays and Saturdays at first, but then increased its viewing to a seven day schedule. Not only did the theatre provide entertainment, it also supported the community by having March of Dimes collections, Bond Drives during World War I, and Red Cross Drives. It also worked in conjunction with Caloric to create Christmas parties and with the Lutheran Orphan Home to provide movies for the children free of charge (Topton Diamond Jubilee, 1951 88). Lastly, the Palace Theatre also encouraged advertisement of the local businesses. They would allow them to hang their advertisements in the lobby of the
theatre. They would have promotional nights, on which they would hand out dishes and other merchandise to their patrons (Larry Werst).

The bowling alley was the other major provider of entertainment for the community. The bowling alleys were first built in 1905. They too expanded and moved to a new location in 1932 when a new building was erected that included four bowling alleys and two pool tables in addition to a restaurant. Clearly this was a large endeavor, but a successful one until the process of globalization began. Once people were used to going outside of Topton for all of their other needs, there was no need to stay in the town for their entertainment.

This “old” Topton was the “perfect” place for its inhabitants. It provided its dwellers with industries that were the main employers, small businesses that catered to every need of the people, and opportunities for entertainment. Nothing else was needed except for the occasional trip to Allentown or Reading to pick up the one or two things the local stores did not have. Larry Werst, as a child, was faced with one of these times when baseball season started and a new glove was necessary. His parents and he would ride either the bus or the train to Reading or Allentown to pick out the new glove he would wear for the season. Notice how they did not drive to either place, but used communal transportation. Larry noted that his parents did not even own a car (Larry Werst). This is once again a small example of just how centralized Topton was. It is certain that there were many members of the community who shared in this same experience of mass transit to the larger areas. Once again though it was most likely an activity that fostered the sense of community because they inhabitants of Topton surely did not travel alone, but would have gone with their families, neighbors, and friends.
This small town atmosphere all began to slowly, but steadily change. Around the late 1970’s to early 1980’s all of this began to change as globalization began to take place. As more and more larger companies were created, those that were in Topton began to suffer. Many of the industries in the area had closed by this point in time, which meant that Topton was no longer employing its people within its “walls.” Once that happened people were going out of the town to work, which meant they were more likely to also shop out of town. This was trouble for the small town businesses. They began to lose their business to the other outside chains that could, perhaps, not provide the small town atmosphere, but the “one stop shopping” that was becoming more and more popular. As the business closed down there was one final step in the globalization of Topton; the movement of its entertainment providers. By this time the small bowling alleys and even smaller theatres could certainly not compete with the bowling alleys boasting more lanes and the large multiplex theatres. People were used to working outside of Topton, shopping outside of Topton, and now they would become accustomed to seeking entertainment outside of Topton. Globalization had occurred.

One company that can truly serve as both an example of this and a possible catalyst was Caloric. In April of 1987 the plant had “reached [its] production capacity here in Topton” (“Caloric Plans Third Facility; Topton at Capacity”). The vice-president, Michael P. Watts, continued with the ideas that the Topton based facility was too old for renovation and an addition to the present space would not be feasible. In other words, they would have to move if they wanted to keep expanding as a company. Watts stated that the company would base its headquarters still in Topton and that there were “no plans to close its facility at Topton or too lay off any of its workers” (“Caloric Plans
Third Facility; Topton at Capacity”). However, this was not going to be the case. By July of 1991, the Reading Times wrote an article entitled “Caloric Exit From Berks Set for October.” The article talks of how on October 31, 1991, Caloric will shut down its company in Topton. “Certain key employees” would be offered new positions at the new plant in South Carolina where labor was going to be cheaper, but that would only be a fraction of the 200 employees that were left after numerous mass lay-offs that took place within the company the proceeding months. Not only would the employees be losing their jobs that some of them had held for 30 to 40 years, the tax base of the district was about to change severely. Caloric’s leaving was a major blow to the community and its inhabitants (‘Caloric Exit From Berks Set for October). Globalization had reached the final major contributor in Topton and the effects were widespread.

However, it is not certain that globalization was only a force of destruction. There were some major positives that followed the expediting of the Topton industry that was once found in the area. Larry Werst talks about one of these positives as it can be seen in the police force. Topton used to have its own “Topton Police Force.” The force consisted of nine constables, two part-time police officers, a full-time chief, and some other various members (Topton Centennial 1876-1976 24). Clearly as the town grew they were unable to provide adequate protection and Topton acquired the regional police. This was a positive step forward for the town because the regional police were able to respond faster and more broadly to the entire area. A second positive result of globalization is seen in the reduction of prejudices that once controlled the area. Larry Werst was able to also point out this fact and as the mayor he would perhaps be possible labeled as an authority on the subject. Although there are still prejudices among the older
members of the community, it is through comparing their views to the more youthful views that one is able to determine the decrease in prejudices that most likely came from the globalization of Topton.

The path of globalization can be hard to trace in some areas, but this is certainly not the case in Topton, Pennsylvania. By looking at the major industry and business that Topton was contained it is hard to imagine how it turned into the town it is today. Today it contains housing development upon housing development with a few businesses, such as Tony’s Italian Restaurant, Herman’s Drive Thru, Hess Gas Station, and Topton Video. There is certainly no sign of the once prosperous bakers, clothing retailers, drug stores and the small business such as hardware and furniture that did manage to survive are certainly not thriving as they did before globalization. In addition to this fact, there is one “industry,” Electro-Space, which appears to employ around 20 people, which is certainly a small fraction of the members of the community. All of this can be explained as globalization and its effects. The global sphere was able to reach Topton and in turn change it from the thriving, self-contained community it once was, to a large housing development. Whether or not one views this is as a positive change or a negative change, there is no denying that it took place and will continue to take place as the community grows and its inhabitants spread out more and more to surrounding areas.
Works Cited


The National Bank of Topton. 55th Anniversary Year.


