THE IMPACT OF SCIENCE AND INVENTION

We have referred to the simplicity of life and organization in Cunningham’s day in contrast to the complexity of social organization in the 1950’s. Neenah in the ’70s was quite sufficient unto itself. Today the life of the Twin Cities and its adjoining townships is melded.

For instance, every working day about an equal number of people cross and recross Nicolet Boulevard going to and from their work. Therefore, typical Menasha industrial enterprises, employing substantial numbers of Neenah citizens, find a logical place in this sketch.

Not only that, we reach beyond to Appleton, the source of our electric power. It was on the bank of the Fox River at Appleton that the first hydroelectric station in the world was instituted in 1882.

Nor can we get into the detail of our undertaking without a bird’s eye glimpse of the wonderful changes that have come to pass during the 80 years since Mr. Cunningham laid down his pen. In his day the oil lamp, the dirt road, the horse and buggy, the cistern in the basement, the neighborhood well and the outside toilet characterized the life of the time.

The shopping radius was pretty much limited by walking distances, except for the one day of the week when farmers drove to town with their produce and hitched their horses, while their wives shopped in the village stores.

The steam engine was a commonplace in 1878, but electricity, with all the gadgets and services made possible by that newly-found power, came into being during the era now under observation. Conveniences such as electric refrigeration, that displaced natural ice, entered within the memory of many not-so-old residents. Air conditioning and electric washers for clothes and dishes were introduced subsequent to World War I.

The telephone:—who of us can visualize life without it, yet that invaluable means of communication did not come into general use until

21
the first decade of the century. In 1900 the local Kimberly-Clark office had a single wall phone with a crank to call “Central!” A private line provided contact with its mills at Appleton before the Wisconsin Telephone Company had strung its wires.

Radio and television were as far from the mind of man in the '80s as the modern guided missile was from soldiers of the Civil War. The shift to thermostatically controlled oil and gas heat, displacing the coal stove and the hand-fired furnace, is within the memory of citizens in their thirties.

The Saturday night bath was a luxury until 1936. Rain water from the roof conducted to a cistern in the basement and pumped by hand into a tank in the attic was doled out sparingly to members of the household. During dry seasons Will Wing, Will Pearson, Herman Vogt and others did a thriving business of replenishing dry cisterns with raw river water.

In 1893 our city fathers, pressured by a rising tide of desire for a city water system, dug an artesian well adjoining our lake shore and laid water mains throughout the principal streets of the city. The belief was deeply rooted that pure drinking water could be obtained only from an underground supply. This belief was probably justified, for water analysis and purification, as we now know it, had not been perfected. Joy and satisfaction over Neenah’s new water system was destined to be short-lived. Water from the deep well carried an abnormally high content of mineral salts (60 grains or more per gallon); cooking utensils, even water glasses, were promptly coated with calcium and lime. Boiler tubes and water lines became clogged. Neither dishes nor clothes could be washed in it. It curdled the soap. Water softening devices for home use eventually helped some, but their use was limited. Almost everyone kept their basement cisterns. No one will ever know how many families seeking a new home decided to settle elsewhere because of Neenah’s impossible city water. Neenah voted overwhelmingly in April 1936 for a soft water system, using treated water from Lake Winnebago. A year later pure soft water flowed into the city mains. That interesting story is told in Part II.

Less dramatic but of equal interest is the story of the origin and development of Neenah’s sewer system. See Part II.
The Auto

In our overlook at the marvels of science that have enriched our lives since 1878, we save for final mention the invention of the internal combustion engine and the pneumatic rubber tire resulting in the automobile. No other single invention has so transformed our way of life. We cannot be sure who owned the first automobile in Neenah. We can say, however, that Ferd Wilde, C. W. Howard, Mrs. C. H. Brown, Dr. E. J. Smith and Dr. T. D. Smith were among the first. The auto today is the key factor in the planning and replanning of cities and their surrounding areas. Referred to in its early days as the “horseless carriage,” it soon induced a popular demand for hard-surfaced roads, with the result that, within two generations, untold thousands of miles of concrete and black top highways span the nation.

Another thing the auto did was to create a demand for reliable road

Here, believe it or not, is Mayhew Mott in his air-cooled Knox. Mayhew drove this car to Mattoon and sold it to Dr. Riordan for $300. Date April 7, 1908. L. to R. Roy Palmer, Mayhew, Dr. Riordan. Mayhew said it took him 24 hours to make that trip.
maps. To quote from a publication of our State Historical Society:

Early motorists often had to resort to bicycle maps to guide them on their Sunday excursions, for no official highway map existed.

One such bicycle map, published in 1896 by the League of American Wheelmen, utilizes a unique road marking system. Roads were labeled “good,” “medium” or “bad” and “level,” “hilly” or “very hilly.” The road between Milwaukee and Wauwatosa, for instance, was indicated as being level and medium; but that between Blue Mounds and Cross Plains as very hilly and medium. Steep grades were as hazardous to the motorist as they were strenuous to the Wheelman.

Even as late as 1914 Wisconsin highway maps indicate the lack of an extensive road system. There was no main highway leading up the Door county peninsula—the road stopped at Sturgeon Bay. All over the early maps short black lines indicating main routes rush off briefly toward a town, then stop short at the destination. There were no connecting junctions and picking up a route from one town to another often meant considerable back-tracking.

Influenced by the auto, the radius of industrial employment widened from the neighborhood to the adjoining cities and counties. Every working day sees a flow of people from Oshkosh to Kaukauna coming and going to their work and doing it with greater ease than our forebears negotiated a mile or two. With an automobile in the family, the housewife’s shopping area widened from two or three miles, to ten, thirty—even 100 miles. One-room country schools combined into more efficient county units; the school bus, seen on all roads, brings increasing numbers of rural students to the city high school.

As these lines are written, we are witnessing a phenomenon that some have called “our exploding cities.” Following World War I there began a trickle of city folk into the adjacent rural areas, lured by a desire for more elbow room, country living and lower taxes. As auto ownership became general during the ’30s, and following the second World War, the trickle became a flood. Suburbs are currently growing faster than the parent city.

Such population movement always brings in its wake a package of interrelated problems between the parent city and its urban-rural neighbors. Locally, it presented a Pandora’s box of tensions and misunderstandings over taxes, school situations, annexations and municipal services and privileges which the former city dweller was accustomed to enjoy and which he is reluctant to abandon.

Not the least of the problem of our civilization on wheels is the park-
ing question. Shopping centers on the city's rim, with plentiful land for the parking of cars, attract not only the rural shopper, but many residents of the inner city.

That Neenah has felt the impact of this outward movement, witness the increase in chain food stores and residential and industrial building to the south and west of the city.

It will be an interesting backward look in the year 2000 to view the measures our city and its mercantile leaders shall have taken, or have failed to take, to preserve real estate values and business investments at the city's heart.

Many readers of these words will be able, with a bit of imagination, to add to the illustrations here noted. Possibly the epochal flight of Charles A. Lindbergh in 1927 fittingly dramatizes the onrush of these many products of research and engineering skill that have crowded in upon our generation. It was on May 20 of that year that he took off alone for Paris, landing in the evening of May 21, after a non-stop flight of 3,610 miles in about 33½ hours. For this achievement Lindbergh was feted in France, Belgium and England—and on his return to this country, he was lionized in New York and Washington. To us, as we look back across the intervening thirty years, the significant fact is that this trans-Atlantic flight of the "Spirit of St. Louis" opened the door to world air travel, which, in 1958, is accepted in the same matter-of-fact fashion as boarding a bus or a railroad train.

**A Story by Decades**

What follows is a sketch, by decades.

Our effort is to be considered a framework to which many readers will be able to add items of human interest and factual value. To promote this idea of a cooperative and continuing history, the reader will find blank pages at the end of each chapter. Use these pages to note your suggestions. Spotting of any factual errors will be particularly appreciated.

When Neenah nears her centennial in 1973, this home-made effort should be revised in the light of the added material that you can assist in providing.

It is suggested that all additions and corrections be lodged with officers of the local Historical Society.
Notes

C

This page contains notes on the Cunningham family and their business. The text discusses the history of the business and its location changes over the years. It mentions the establishment of the present business and its founders, E. N. Kelloch and Henry Drag. The page also includes a note about the sale of Wisconsin Avenue in 1956 and the opening of a new location in 1959. The text provides a brief history of the business and its evolution over time.
Notes