CHAPTER IV.

Cambridge Today.

Cambridge, as a community center, has changed greatly in the last ten years. During the Great War the farmers of this part of the country became very prosperous. Prices of farm produce went up by leaps and bounds, and though the general trend of all prices was higher, and a dollar would not purchase as much as in 1910 for instance, still the income of most farmers had doubly increased. The natural conclusion to draw from this increased buying power on the part of the farmers would be that the village did accordingly, that much more business. But that fact is only true in part. With the farmer's increased prosperity came their desire and ability to own automobiles, and it is the coming of the automobile principally that has caused the change in Cambridge.

Perhaps the change in the business of the town is the most noticed. The coming of the automobile enabled the farmers to come to town more quickly and therefore more often. From that point of view, the town should have been benefited. But another result was that the farmers could also make much longer trips to towns farther away, and make them with as much ease as they had formerly made the short trip to the nearest town. It is this fact that has brought the changes. Since farmers can and do go to Janesville, Stoughton, Madison, and even to Milwaukee to shop, naturally the business of the village has suffered. The area of competition has increased and the merchants have to compete with
the merchants in these larger towns that are farther away. But again I must qualify my statement for the business of the town has suffered mainly in the character of the business it does, not in the quantity of it. For instance, the sale of ready-made garments has a small place in the dry-goods business of Cambridge. In the days when all the clothes were made in the home by a seamstress hired for the purpose, materials etc. found a ready sale in the town. But since ready-made garments are the vogue, the size of our stores does not allow them to deal with this commodity to any extent. Even if they did attempt to do it, they would be compelled to charge relatively higher prices and they would be unable to compete with the larger stores in the larger towns. So the clothing business has decreased measurably. This same condition exists in the boot and shoe business. People preferred to do their shopping in this line in larger stores where there were more styles to choose from. Our merchants could not hope to compete successfully on this basis, so the shoe stores gradually went out of business, and though each dry-goods merchant carried a small line of shoes, principally work shoes and school shoes, it really amounted to nothing. Within the last year or so the business in plain, every-day shoes has picked up, due perhaps, to the feeling that the people have that the prices charged elsewhere are too exorbitant.

Thus Cambridge has become a supply station, in a very real sense of the word, to the farmer and to the townspeople themselves of only the more necessary things of life, the ordinary every-day things that everyone has to have. As far as luxuries
go, or fancy clothing or shoes, there is little demand for them, so of course, a correspondingly small supply.

Cambridge has also decreased as a social center of the community in these last years. The town has not been able to provide amusement enough for the country people, so on "Saturday" nights many of them go elsewhere. This is especially true among the younger people; for the older people, Cambridge, still is sufficiently exciting. The essential thing about this is that the town has done very little to hold these people. Anything in the way of community club rooms, with facilities for reading, physical recreation and amusement has been considered unnecessary and the boys and girls just naturally go in another direction where such things, even though less wholesome, can be found. The school has increased its enrollment, not from any larger area, but more young people are demanding an education today within the natural extent of the influence of the town and more farmers can afford to send their children when they can go back and forth each day in their car. The automobile has had little influence on the importance of the town as a religious center. What changes that have been brought about came as a result of other conditions, entirely. And so, as a social center Cambridge has also diminished in importance, the only really concrete thing that is done is the annual party held each year. One year the farmers entertain the townspeople, and the next year the townspeople entertain the farmers, and here the social influence of the town practically ends, as far as any efforts put forth by the people themselves are concerned.
There have been one or two phases of the business life of Cambridge that have not been affected. One of these is the milling business. The amount done each year is certainly greater than it used to be, although the mill deals in a much larger number of commodities than it ever has before. The manufacture of flour has gradually been reduced to a mere nothing, and now it does none at all. Instead it buys its flour and retails it out to its customers. It also buys and retails all the various kinds of manufactured feed. Then it has taken over a great part of the fuel business of the town, and during the winter months does a great deal in that line. Thus the whole sum of the business of the mill has not decreased, and it still plays a great part in the life of the town. Another business that has not diminished is that of the banks. Both of them, the International Bank, and The Bank of Cambridge, do a lot of business, and have really extended the area of their influence rather than decreased it.

Still another business that has not been affected is that of the electric company. In 1911 there had been a movement started for the establishment of an electric lighting system for the village. It was soon underway and a dynamo was put in run by water power. This system was used for about six years and then was discarded, and now the electricity comes from the Kilbourne dam up through Edgerton. These lines have been extended north to London, out around the Lake and even west of town. Thus the electric business has also increased greatly in the last ten years.

The latter part of 1923, a survey was taken of the economic relation of the village of Cambridge, and several other
such small towns, with the country surrounding them. Farmers were visited on all sides of the village and data collected concerning where they did their trading in general, where they did it for certain commodities, where they went to church, where they sent their children to school, and so on, endless questions were asked and endless answers received. From the data collected the maximum service area of the town was first computed. This area was determined by ascertaining the farther-most points in every direction to which any service of any kind whatsoever extended from the town, and then a swinging curve line was drawn to connect them. Then using four special commodities, groceries, furniture, good clothes, and work clothes, the extent of the service of each one was determined within the maximum service area, which, of course, always remained the same. Then this same process was gone through for the financial, marketing, communication, education, religious, and social services of the town. Points at which the trade areas of other towns entered that of Cambridge were noted and indicated by arrows on the figures plotted from this data. The following diagrams will show the results, and give an opportunity for a comparison of the extent of these various services.

General Trade Areas and Maximum Service Area

Economic Service - Groceries

Economic Service - Furniture

Economic Service - Work Clothes

Economic Service - Good Clothes

Financial Service - Banking

Marketing Service - Produce or Shipping Concern

Communication Service - Mail Delivery
The above diagrams indicate the extent of the trade area of Cambridge in the above commodities. The outer curved line indicates the maximum service area (secured by superimposing onto each other all the individual commodity areas). The inner area is that over which the commodity is sold. The figure in the center is Cambridge. The arrows indicate points at which other trade areas encroach on that of Cambridge. The circles indicate open country stands.²

² Copied from: J. H. Kolb—"Service Relations of Town and Country"—Research Bulletin No. 58 of Agricultural Experiment Station of U. of W., pp. 44-67
In comparing these diagrams it can readily be seen just exactly to what extent the various services of Cambridge are used by the farmers. In the economic service groceries and work clothes excell the other two. The banking service extends over a wide area, as also does the communication and educational service. The others are small not extending very far, in most cases beyond what one would expect in any town. In all a very clear picture is gained of the exact relation of the town of Cambridge to the country in 1923 and enables one to ascertain quite correctly the position of the town as a community center.

In the last ten years there has been another factor that has increasingly affected the business of the town, the trade of the summer campers and tourists. Lake Ripley, as it is now called, has become one of the most popular small summer resorts of this part of the country and hundreds of people come to spend their vacations there each summer. There are two large hotels and three smaller ones besides the great number of privately owned cottages. Since the lake is only about a half a mile from town, all of its trade is given to the stores there. From June to September the merchants reap profits from their beautiful little lake. Then, too, Cambridge is located on a state highway from Madison to Milwaukee and all during the spring, summer, and fall tourists travel through the town. Most of them stop for supplies and camp at the public camping grounds at the Lake or stop at the Hotel or restaurants in town for meals. In this way is the business of the town still further increased.

At the same time that Cambridge has changed in character
so too has it changed in appearance. It is one of the prettiest small towns in this part of the state. While the business section still occupies only about three or three and a half blocks of the main street, it is a much more modern main street than it was for instance in 1915. Several new buildings have been erected and are now being used for the most up-to-date stores. There are at present four dry-goods and grocery stores, a very modern drug-store, a clothing store, a feed store, the mill, the black-smith shops, three large garages, three restaurants, two barber shops, the printing office, the electric shop, two banks, a large hall, and several other small establishments. All of these people are doing a fine business and the village seems to be prospering.

In 1921 a Candy Manufacturing Company was organized in the town. For three years now they have been in existence making all kinds of candies and apparently are very successful. It is rather small in comparison to some candy manufacturing concerns, but nevertheless it has grown every year and seems to be taking on the aspect of a real "going" concern. If its present success continues, it will no doubt add prestige to the name and town of Cambridge.

The five churches are still in existence although the Hough Church no longer holds services. Most of its original members have moved away or have died, and what few are left have affiliated either with the Norwegian Lutheran or Methodist Churches. The building still stands, however, and there is a movement on foot for turning it into a club room. The other churches are all
still very active and do a great deal to keep up the standards of the community.

The school today is also improving. Three years ago, a commercial course was added to those then given and this has drawn more boys and girls to enroll there. At present the enrollment averages from a hundred to a hundred and twenty-five in the high school.

The town itself has grown very little. More retired farmers move in each year, but others move out. Its population stays about the same. In the last census, it was around 700, in the incorporated half. The town as I have said before, is divided by the County line. That part which lies in Jefferson County has never been incorporated with the rest. There have been several movements started with this end in view, but they have always been blocked. They are, evidently, afraid that their taxes will increase more than the advantages to be gained from the affiliation will warrant. So it still remains divided and it seems unprobable that it will change right away. Considering both parts of the town, its population is around 1000.

The town itself has many advantages. It is completely modern with its electric lighting system, water-system, and sewage system. It is near enough to Madison, twenty three miles, to make it very convenient. It is surrounded by other larger towns, offering those advantages that Cambridge is too small to afford. It is not connected with a railroad, since 1916 when the spur line to London was abandoned for lack of business, but the improved roads make hauling by truck even more advantageous than
otherwise and automobile trips to the nearest railroad towns are easily made. This very year, 1924, the streets of the village are to be paved, improving the town still more. The nearness of the Lake gives the town another advantage and since a large public park is being constructed by the town on the side of the Lake nearest it, the two will be brought still closer together.

In short, the town has an interesting historical background, an important function to serve in the country and as such has found its place in the development of the state, and exists a quiet, attractive little village.