

COMMERCIAL

NEENAH'S commercial life from the 1870's to the year of this writing has followed the pattern of many another American community. In the horse and buggy age the shopping area was close up. People within the community were within walking distance of their grocer, butcher or their dry goods merchant. Once a week was shopping day for the rural neighbors, who drove to town over dirt roads.

Then came the interurban railway and Appleton and Oshkosh were brought within the shopping range of Neenah housewives. The revolution, however, came with the introduction of the automobile during the early decades of the 20th century. The auto brought demand for hard surfaced roads, and this, in turn, widened Neenah's shopping area to 25, 50—even 100 miles. No longer can Neenah's merchants complacently count on local patronage as their monopoly. They are at once in competition with their area—from Green Bay on the north, to Milwaukee on the south.

Furthermore, they cannot avoid responsibility for customer parking. Failure at this point puts the entire downtown commercial area in jeopardy and encourages the growth of shopping centers on the city's outskirts, where cheaper real estate facilitates adequate and convenient parking for cars. An outstanding example of this trend is the Valley Fair in Winnebago County south of Appleton's city limits. The I.G.A. and Red Owl food stores on the south margin of Neenah are typical of this trend.

To further add to the discomfiture of the downtown merchant is the movement of city residents into the rural or shore regions beyond the city's boundaries.

On the other hand it must be recognized that these trends are two-way streets. The local merchant, professional man or banker who offers superior service attracts his share of patronage from this widening field.

To Edward Jandrey was assigned the task of compiling the voluminous commercial history. There went to the management of every

store and commercial establishment in the city an invitation to participate, through contribution of a paragraph naming present owners, changes in ownership or location since 1878, nature of business and any personal information of interest to posterity. Recognition of the enterprises who responded is woven throughout the decade write-up in Part I, with particular attention being given to the older commercial establishments. Failure to respond was interpreted as a disinterested attitude toward appearance in the pages of this book.

However, the City Directory, printed annually by the Johnson Publishing Co. of Manitowoc, is complete and will always be available.

