

THE OHIO JOURNAL OF SCIENCE

VOL. LI

MARCH 1951

No. 2

A HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF CAMBRIDGE, OHIO*

JOSEPH APPLEBY

1710 Malasia Rd., Akron, Ohio

Guernsey County, of which Cambridge is the county seat and only major city, is located within that section of the Appalachian Plateau Province which Fenneman designates as the Unglaciated Allegheny Plateau.¹ Cambridge is 75 miles east of Columbus, 54 miles north of Marietta and 52 miles west of Wheeling, West Virginia.

The modern city of today with its brightly lighted business district, its many diversified industries, its excellent park and recreational facilities, bears little resemblance to the ferry town of 1803, when the majority of the people made their living farming the fertile land along the banks of Wills Creek.

With the defeat of the Indians in Ohio, the northwest was opened to settlement. Travelers from the east on reaching Wheeling, took flatboats down the Ohio River if they wished to go further west. The fact that the interior of Ohio could be reached only with great difficulty prompted Congress in 1796 to authorize Ebenezer Zane to blaze a trail from Wheeling to Limestone, Kentucky.² Zane was to open the trace and establish bridges or ferries over the larger streams but the smaller streams were to be forded.

Wills Creek was the first major crossing in the path of the trace. A ferry had to be established at this location. This ferry crossing was to be the nucleus around which the settlement of Cambridge was formed.

Employed by the Federal government to make a survey of the area, George Metcalf, a Virginian, was impressed by its latent possibilities. Writing his uncle, Jacob Gomber, he urged him to buy land in the area. In 1803, Gomber and his partner John Beatty purchased the land that now includes Cambridge, west to New Concord, for the sum of \$2,000.³

After purchasing the land, Gomber and Beatty, in 1806, laid out the town of Cambridge. They staked out houselots, 140 in all, and left the removal of the forests to the purchasers of the lots.⁴

In the years 1805-1806 Napoleon was making preparations for the invasion of England. For protection, the English stationed troops on the little island of Guernsey in the English Channel. This caused many inhabitants to leave the island and seek new homes. The first of these people reached Cambridge in August, 1806, on their way west. Impressed by the possibilities of the settle-

*This paper is a condensed form of an M.A. thesis prepared at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.

¹Nevin M. Fenneman, *Physiography of Eastern United States*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1938), p. 290.

²*Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publication*, (Columbus, Ohio), Volume XIII, p. 312.

³Material obtained from Mr. Carl J. Rech, County Historian, Guernsey County, Ohio, September, 1949.

⁴William G. Wolfe, *Stories of Guernsey County, Ohio*, (Cambridge, Ohio: published by author, 1943), pp. 534-535.

ment they decided to stay and make their homes. With few exceptions the early settlers came to engage in agriculture. They were attracted by the favorable climate, the tillable land, and the fertile soil.⁵

In 1810, Cambridge was selected as the site for the county seat of the new governmental unit formed from parts of Muskingum and Belmont counties. It was perhaps the offer of Gomber and Beatty, founders of the town, to furnish without charge the lands and buildings to house the county offices, that led to Cambridge being chosen over Beymerstown (Old Washington).

Fifteen years later in 1825, Congress authorized the extension of the National Road westward.⁶ It was not until 1827, however, that the road was surveyed through Cambridge. In the early days of the road, wagoners hauling the agricultural products of the west to the markets at Wheeling were a familiar sight in town as well as the drovers and their livestock. Stagecoach companies ran a daily schedule from Columbus to Wheeling, passing through Cambridge. Each had a particular place in which to stop. Stagecoach companies had their taverns, drovers their drovestands, and the wagoners their wagonstands. The Hutchinson tavern located on the present site of the National Hotel had accommodations for everyone.

With the opening of the National Road a period of more rapid development set in. By 1837 Cambridge became an incorporated village with over 1000 inhabitants.⁷

The State Legislature, in 1847, authorized the construction of a railroad from the Ohio River west through Cambridge, Newark, and on to Columbus. The Central Ohio Railroad Company was to determine the route and construct the road. Seven years later passenger traffic was opened between Cambridge and Zanesville. Passenger traffic alone was not able to sustain the cost of operation and the railroad went into the hands of a receivership. In 1866 it became part of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

With the railroad came the telegraph. Cambridge was now connected to the outside world by three means of communication: the National Road, the railroad, and the telegraph.

Approximately 20 years after the establishment of the Central Ohio Railroad, enthusiasm was aroused in Cambridge over the proposed construction of the Cleveland-Marietta railroad. The people of Guernsey county subscribed to \$153,000 worth of bonds to help finance the railroad through the county. In order to raise the required money, the village in 1873 purchased the farm area on the south side of Wills Creek and divided it into houselots for the railroad workers. The money derived from the sale of these lots was used to build the railroad. This new addition became known as the "South Side."⁸

The coming of the railroad inaugurated a period of considerable mining activity. Although coal was known to have existed in the area prior to this time, there were no facilities to transport it to the outside markets. With the railroads this situation was now changed and coal mining became one of the principal sources of wealth to the community.

With the development of the coal fields, and later the natural gas fields, plus the availability of clay, lumber, and water, and the excellent transportation facilities, incentive was given industries to locate in Cambridge.

⁵*Guernsey Milestones*, booklet of the Sesquicentennial Celebration, Cambridge, Ohio, August 31 to September 26, 1948, pp. 12-13.

⁶Arthur Butler Hulbert, *Historic Highways, the Cumberland Road*, (Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), Volume X, pp. 73-76.

⁷Col. P. B. Sarchet, *History of Guernsey County, Ohio*, (Indianapolis, Indiana: B. F. Bowen and Company, 1911), pp. 250-251.

⁸Information obtained from Mr. Carl J. Rech, County Historian, Guernsey County, Ohio, November, 1949.

In 1889, a concern from New Philadelphia agreed to establish a steel rolling mill in the city under the provisions that Cambridge was to furnish the site and provide \$30,000 towards the construction of the plant. In return the steel company was to use coal from the Cambridge field and employ local labor. The main products of the Cambridge Iron and Steel Company were corrugated sheets and sheets for roofing. Four years later the Morton Tin Plate Company was established in Cambridge. After a few years of operation these plants were purchased by the American Sheet Steel and Tin Plating Company. As a result of a later merger between this company and the Carnegie-Illinois Steel Company, the Cambridge plants became the property of the latter. Raw materials for processing were brought to Cambridge from Pittsburgh.⁹

The mills were located on opposite sides of town. The Cambridge Iron and Steel Company was in the northwest section (the present site of the Marion Power and Shovel Company) while the Tin-Plate company was in the southeast in the present vicinity of Universal Potteries. In both cases the plants were located in the valley of Wills Creek. As in the case of the railroad the village purchased land from the farmers to provide the sites for the plants and then divided the remainder into homesites to be sold to raise the necessary funds. As the land was not too desirable for residential purposes it was not developed to any great extent. Later small industries located in much of the area.

With all the plants in operation the Cambridge iron and steel industries were at their height during and immediately following World War I. Employment was given to over 1600 workers representing approximately 6,000 people. New businesses sprung up to provide goods and services to the rapidly growing population. It is obvious that much of Cambridge's material growth and prosperity resulted from the development of the iron and steel industry.

In addition to the iron and steel industry, furniture, pottery, and glass industries were established about the same time. The Cambridge Glass Company was established in 1901 by the National Glass Company of New York. Cambridge was chosen as the site of the plant because of its nearness to the natural gas fields of West Virginia and the sand beds in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio.¹⁰ As in former cases the city provided the site for the plant. Again land was bought and divided into homesites for the workers in the plant. This area became known as East Cambridge.

Although the pottery industry in Guernsey county dates back to the beginnings of the county, it was not until the first part of the 20th century that it became an important industry in Cambridge. The availability of clay deposits in the immediate vicinity plus the transportation facilities at hand with which to transport the manufactured articles to market, prompted Charles Casey to establish the Cambridge Art Pottery Company in East Cambridge. In 1925 control of the plant passed into the hands of the Globe China Company of Niles, Ohio. During the depression the plant curtailed operations. In 1936 the plant site was purchased by the Oxford Pottery Company of Byesville, Ohio, and the name was changed to the Universal Potteries, Inc. Among the many articles manufactured are semi-porcelain dinnerware, tiling and brick. It is now one of the largest potteries in the United States.

The present population of Cambridge is over 21,000, an increase of approximately 6,000 over 1940.¹¹ The native born white population is by far the dominant group. There is a small Negro population and a yet smaller group of foreign

⁹Wolfe, *op. cit.*, pp. 634-635.

¹⁰Material obtained from personal interviews with members of the staff of the Cambridge Glass Company, Cambridge, Ohio, as well as from various papers and pamphlets furnished by the glass company, September, 1949.

¹¹Statistics obtained from personal interview with the Secretary, Chamber of Commerce, Cambridge, Ohio, September, 1949.

born inhabitants. From a general point of view the standard of living is relatively high. There are few very wealthy families and on the other hand few poor families in the city. Pride in the community is shown by the well-kept homes, the well-maintained roads and the excellent park and recreational facilities that are municipally owned and operated.

The city proper is spread over an area of approximately four square miles. The streets follow a rectangular pattern developed around the original platted village of 1806. The boundary of the original village approximates that of the present main business center.

Land use in Cambridge is divided into three major and four minor groups. The major group includes residential, commercial, and manufactural establishments. The minor group includes educational, religious, governmental, and recreational.

The residential sections of the city are largely located to the north and south of the central business core. The residences do not vary to any great extent in regard to size and maintenance. The exceptions to this generalization are the few superior dwellings located near the city park and a few below-average dwellings in the sections surrounding the main industrial areas. In either case the area involved is not too large in extent.

The business district is centrally located in the city, occupying six city blocks on each side of Wheeling Avenue. It extends from the foot of Wheeling Avenue hill on the west to the intersection with U. S. Route 21 on the east. The business district consists of retail stores and service establishments intermixed with several small wholesale establishments. The buildings are two to three stories high and for the most part constructed of brick. The first floor is used for retail and service stores while the second and third floors are used for offices, residences, and warehousing. Two of the larger categories of establishments are the wearing apparel stores and restaurants. The very large number of restaurants, gas stations, tourist homes, and hotels suggests the very great importance of the transient trade to the city. Other than in the business district there are very few commercial establishments. The almost complete absence of neighborhood grocery and drug stores is evident. The majority of the people, as in the past, come to the main center to do their shopping. Outlying business sections of a small scale may be found to the west and southeast of the main center.

During the depression of 1933-1939, the cessation of operations of the iron and steel industries and the closing of the mines brought unemployment and hardship to the working people and their families. Cambridge was often times referred to as a ghost city.¹² This situation was remedied by the development of the plastic industries. There are now ten separate plastic companies in Cambridge. The Cambridge Glass Company, Universal Potteries, Suitt Brothers Furniture, and the plastics companies now utilize the excess labor supply created by the loss of iron and steel and mining industries. There are now 28 separate manufacturing establishments employing over 4,000 people.¹³

In addition to employment supplied by the various commercial and industrial establishments in the city, over 700 are employed at the Cambridge State Hospital for the mentally ill, 3½ miles north of the city on U. S. Route 21. This hospital was built for the U. S. Army during the early years of World War II.

CONCLUSION

By the study of land-man associations in Cambridge during various periods of occupancy, it has been possible to gain an insight into some of the significant

¹²*Guernsey Milestones, op. cit.*, p. 44.

¹³Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, publication of June, 1949.

factors in the development of the city. The study has shown why the site was selected and how the community has grown.

The future is partially predictable. Since Cambridge is without competition, in its county, it will probably continue to be the seat of governmental and social activities. Situated as it is with an excellent communication system centering on the town, it will continue to be the commercial center of the area. The future prosperity, however, will depend chiefly on the manufactural evolution within the city. The importance it once held as a coal mining and steel manufacturing center no longer exists. Today the plastics, glassworks, pottery, furniture, and other smaller industries have established Cambridge as a light manufacturing center.

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at the Ohio Academy of Science Annual Meeting,
Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, April 6, 1951.
