

# **Accommodations and Retail in Greater Cooperstown, 1987-2007**

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## INTRODUCTION

Although Cooperstown's largest employer remains Bassett Healthcare, the visible landscape has been and is increasingly based on the tourism economy. This is particularly true since 1990 (Thomas et al, 2003). This study explores the face of tourism as it has evolved since the late 1990s.

In order to accomplish this task, the cultural geography of commercial areas is examined. The function of individual retail establishments as well as entire retail districts within the region gives insight into the structure of the overall retail economy. At the same time, an investigation of the type and capacity of lodging establishments in the region can be of assistance in understanding how the tourism economy works.

## METHOD

The current study relies on two surveys and, where appropriate, existing data. The first survey attempts to ascertain the type and capacity of lodging in Cooperstown and the surrounding townships of Otsego, Middlefield, Springfield, and Hartwick. Using internet lodging websites and field surveys, the type of lodging – campsites, private accommodations in homes and apartments, bed & breakfasts and small inns, hotels and motels – was recorded for each municipality. The establishment was then contacted in order to ascertain the peak number of guests who could stay per night, minus additional items such as rollaway beds. Where possible, we relied on the capacities reported by each establishment. Where this was not possible, king, queen, and double beds were

assumed to hold two individuals; twin beds were assumed to hold one. The results were tabulated for each municipality and the region as a whole.

The second survey built on past surveys of the area's retail landscape, adding the town of Springfield as well (Thomas & Cardona, 2002; Thomas et al, 2003; Thomas, 2003). This survey examined retail in commercial areas with high tourist traffic. The study area was limited to urbanized areas within the village of Cooperstown and the surrounding townships (Otsego, Middlefield, Springfield, and Hartwick).

For the purposes of this study, the downtown area was defined as the commercial area of Main Street extending from near the Otsego County Office Complex to the corner with Fair Street. Small areas of commercial activity extending approximately half a block from each side of Main Street along Chestnut and Pioneer Streets, Hoffman and Stagecoach Lanes, and the Doubleday Field area were also included. The Railroad District was defined as Railroad Avenue and the contiguous commercial area along upper Main Street.

A list of addresses in the downtown area was assembled. For each year at two-year intervals beginning in 1997 the businesses located at each address were recorded. Data was collected with the help of lists supplied by the Cooperstown Chamber of Commerce and permit applications supplied by the Village of Cooperstown. Earlier iterations of this data, with in some cases data reaching back to 1979, have been published previously (Thomas & Cardona, 2002; Thomas et al, 2003; Thomas, 2003). Each business recorded was then coded according to the scheme outlined below. For earlier years, interviews with local residents and members of the business community were interviewed and their answers compared and recorded.

Businesses classified as “general” sell goods that are of use to the general population on a regular basis. This definition is inclusive of grocery, pharmaceutical supply, and other such general merchandise. Such businesses often sell items related to tourism, but the primary purpose of such stores is the sale of general merchandise. General stores that supply automotive fuel are designated “General-Fuel” (Thomas, 2003, 163-4).

Specialty stores sell goods that are intended for aesthetic or symbolic use, such as works of art or souvenirs. Boutiques that sell clothes in addition to a number of other specialty items were classified as specialty stores, although the store selling only clothes is classified “general.” Businesses which do not have as a primary orientation baseball related merchandise were classified “specialty, non-baseball.” A “Specialty, baseball” designation is applied to those stores that do have a primary orientation toward baseball related items (Thomas, 2003, 164).

Food Service establishments include businesses whose primary purpose is the preparation and service of food for consumption (Thomas, 2003, 164).

Local (and General) Services include businesses whose primary purpose is to provide a specific service, such as financial services, real estate, or minor production services such as printing, photocopying, or customer service.

A sixth category – art galleries – was also coded.

Bars and taverns were coded separately from food service establishments. In addition, adult oriented retail outlets, such as “head shops,” were also separately coded. Similarly, amusements, such as pool halls and movie theaters, were given separate codes.

Civic institutions, such as the Post Office, city offices, and the offices of non-profit community groups (such as Opportunities for Otsego) were classified as “civic.”

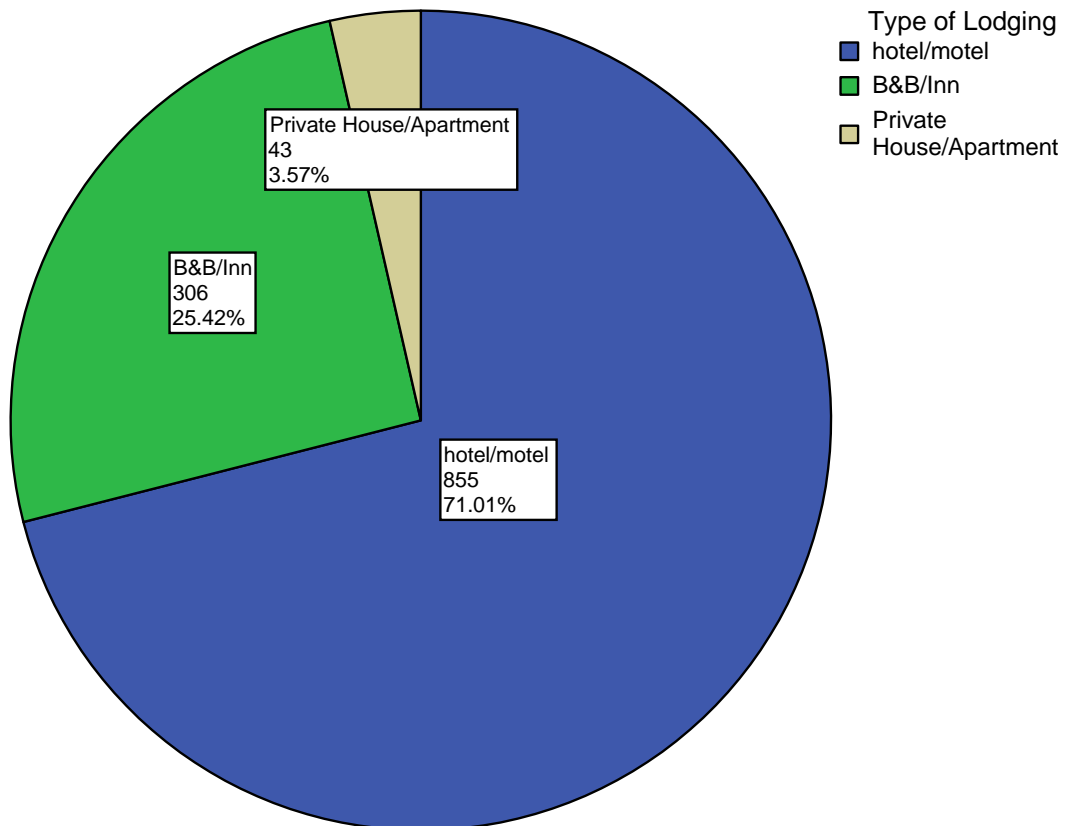
Private clubs, such as the Elks Club, were classified as Private Clubs.

Car dealers and automobiles service shops were classified under “Car/Implement Dealer.” Manufacturing and milling was classified under “Industrial,” whereas warehousing was classified separately.

## RESULTS

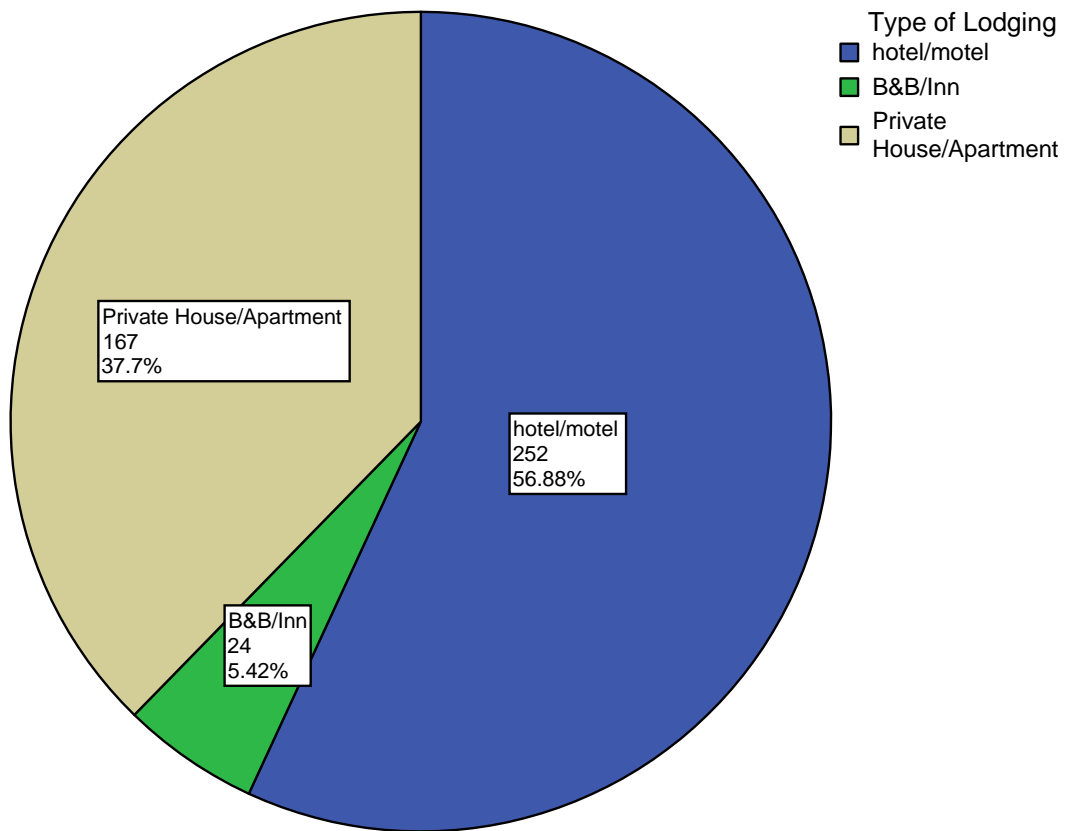
### *Potential Guests by Municipality*

Figure 1: Potential Number of Guests in Cooperstown, 2007



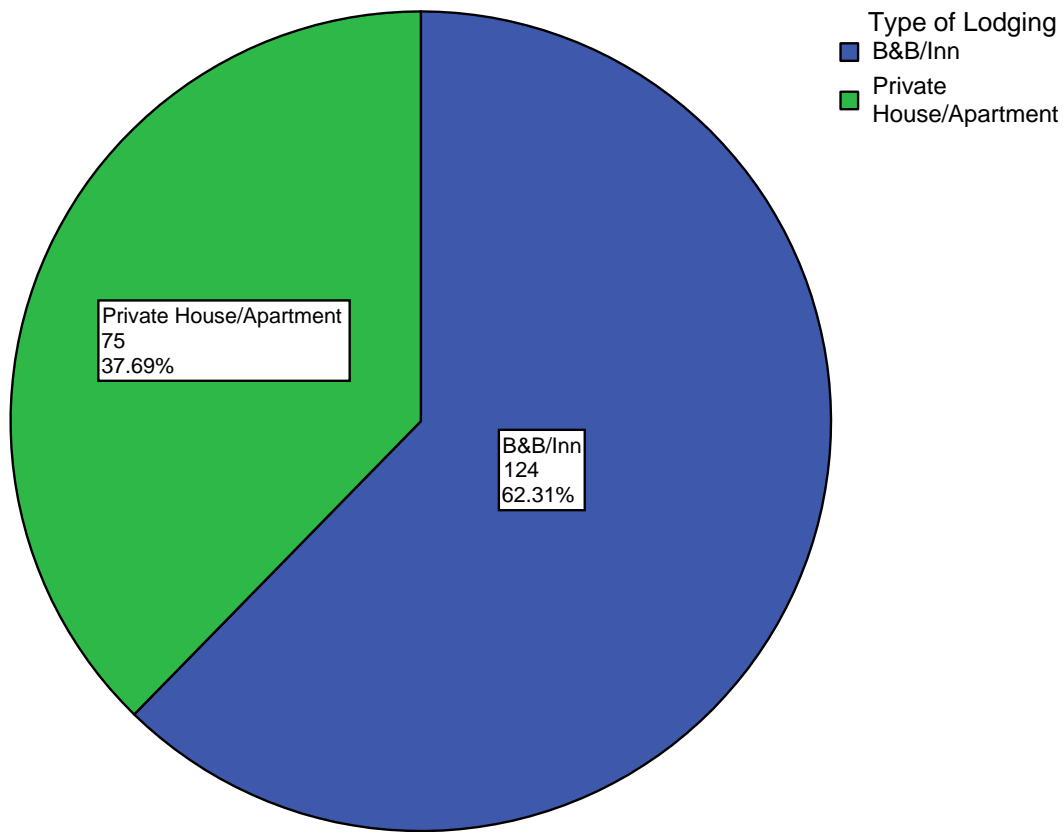
According to the pie charts, the majority of the tourist population staying in Cooperstown resides in hotels and motels. Hotels and motels hold approximately 855 people, or seventy-one percent of the tourist population visiting Cooperstown. Bed and breakfasts and inns hold around 306 people, amounting to twenty-five percent of the tourist population. The last four percent, roughly 43 people, reside in private accommodations during their stay in Cooperstown.

Figure 2: Potential Number of Guests in Otsego, 2007



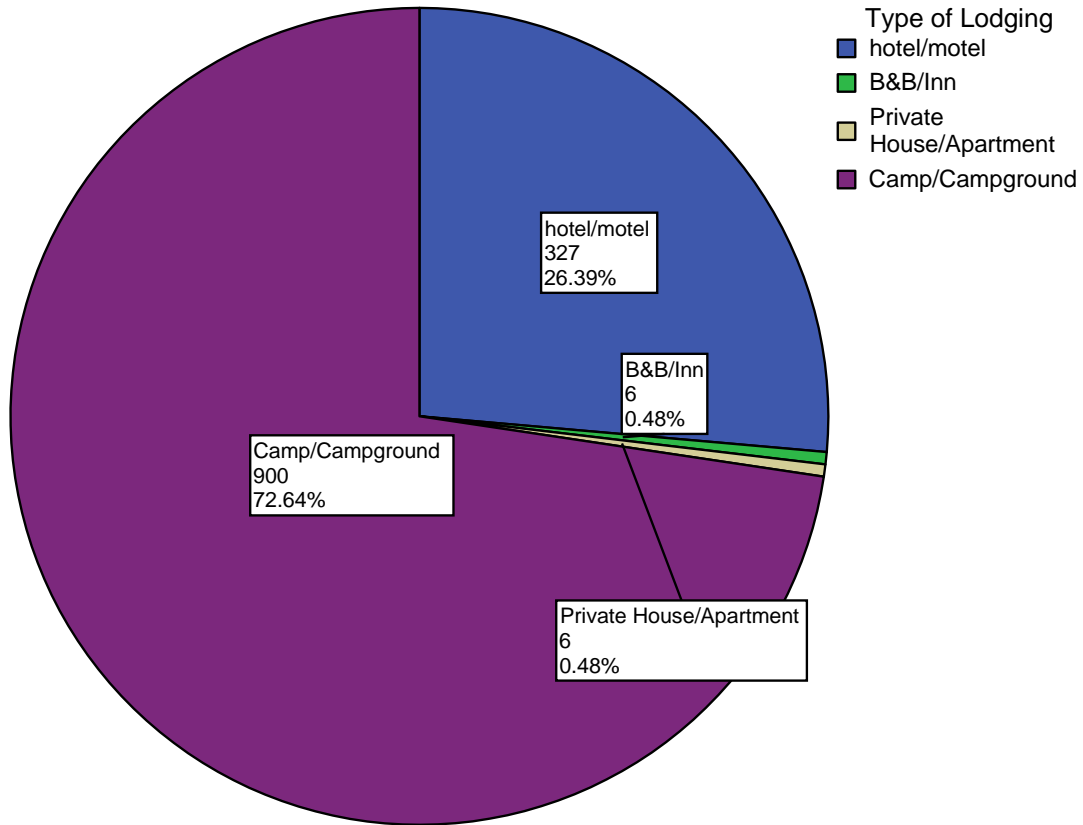
In Otsego, thirty-eight percent of the tourist population stays in private accommodations. That translates into 167 people staying in private rentals. Bed and breakfasts house only five percent of the tourist population or 24 people. Hotels and motels hold 252 people, the remaining fifty-seven percent of tourists.

Figure 3: Potential Number of Guests in Middlefield, 2007



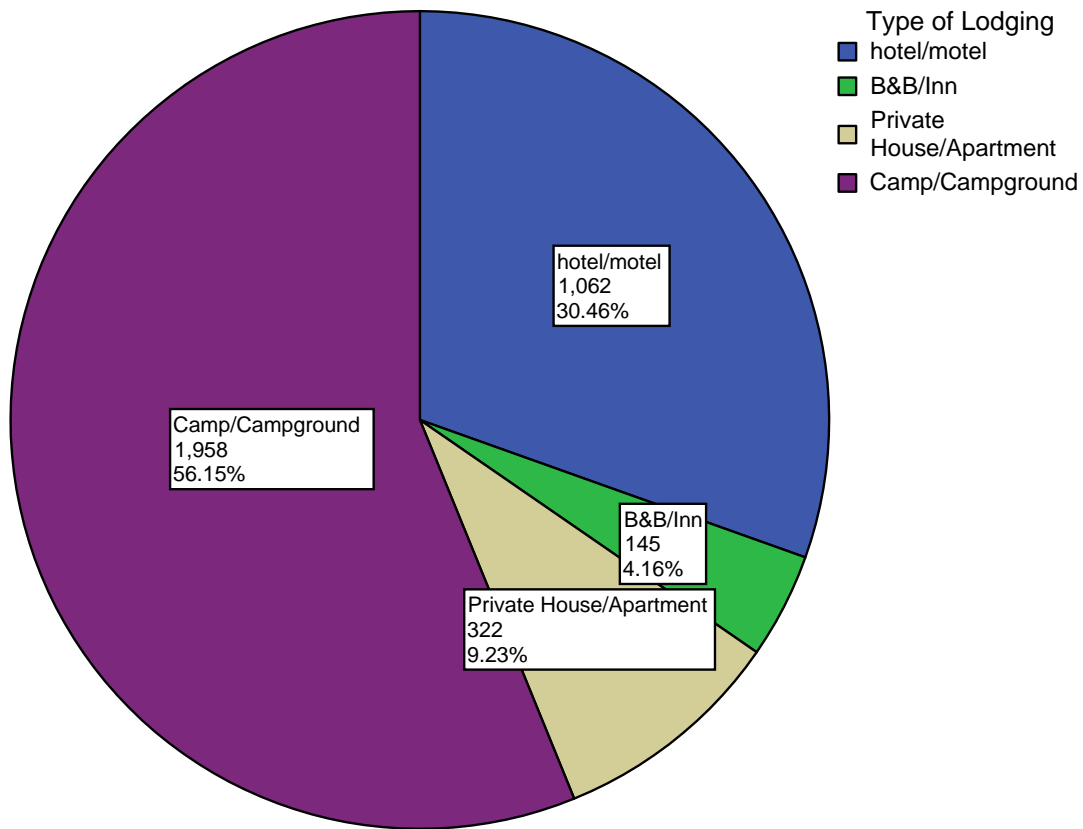
In Middlefield, inns and bed and breakfasts hold the majority of the tourists, 124 people. Bed and breakfasts account for sixty-two percent. The rest of the tourist population, 75 people, is met with private accommodations. Thirty-eight percent of the tourists visiting Middlefield stay in private accommodations.

Figure 4: Potential Number of Guests in Springfield, 2007



Springfield, another small town, contributes quite a bit of housing for tourists. Approximately 900 people, or seventy-four percent of the tourists that stay in Springfield, stay in camps and campgrounds. The remaining twenty-six percent of the tourists mainly stay in hotels and motels. This twenty-six percent amounts to roughly 327 people. Private accommodations and inns and bed and breakfasts hold a very slight number of people, amounting to only 12 combined.

Figure 5: Potential Number of Guests in Hartwick, 2007



In Hartwick, the tourist population number is substantial. Although hotels and motels only account for twenty-nine percent of the tourists, the actual number of people is considerably large. Hotels and motels hold 1062 tourists. Inns and bed and breakfasts do not hold a surplus of people, amounting to only four percent of the tourist population or 145 people. Private accommodations, although quite a large number of people at 322, only make up nine percent of the tourists. Camps and campgrounds in Hartwick hold, by far, the largest amount of people, amounting to fifty-eight percent of the tourists. The number of people that stay in camps and campgrounds is nearly double that which stays in hotels and motels at 2110.

*Relationship to Larger demographic Trends*

Table 1: Population in the Study Area, by Town, 1990-2005

<u>Town</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>Change (%)</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>Change (%)</u>
Hartwick	2,045	2,203	158 (7.7)	2,238	35 (1.6)
Middlefield	2,231	2,249	18 (0.8)	2,444	195 (8.7)
Otsego	3,932	3,904	-28 (-0.7)	3,950	46 (1.2)
Springfield	1,267	1,345	78 (6.2)	1,400	55 (4.1)
TOTAL	9,475	9,701	226 (2.4)	10,032	331 (3.4)

Source: USBC 2000; 2006

Table 1 shows the population of each of the respective townships in the area between 1990 and 2005. Population for the Village of Cooperstown is included in the towns of Middlefield and Otsego and thus not shown here. According to the most recent estimate of population, the area population grew by 3.4 percent since 2000, yielding a total population of **10,032**. This figure marks an acceleration of growth since the 1990s but also a redistribution of residential growth. During the 1990s growth was highest in the towns of Hartwick and Springfield, two towns that also have heavy tourism populations as well. As the new millennium began, residential growth slowed considerably in Hartwick – most likely the result of housing units being converted to temporary rentals – and somewhat in Springfield as well. In turn, growth has accelerated in Middlefield, the township with the least impact from tourism. The town of Otsego, which includes the village of Cooperstown, continued a similar pattern of approximate population stability even as a slight redistribution of residents from inside to outside the village continued.

Table 2: Housing Units in the Study Area, by Town, 2000

<u>Town</u>	<u>Total Housing Units, 2000</u>	<u>Recreational Housing Units, 2000</u>	<u>Percent Recreational</u>	<u>Recreational Housing Population, 2000</u>
Hartwick	1,098	152	13.8	570
Middlefield	1,058	208	19.7	780
Otsego	2,193	312	14.2	1,170
Springfield	723	142	19.6	533
TOTAL	5,072	814	16.0	3,053

Source: USBC, 2000

Table 2 shows data for housing units in the study area. According to the Census Bureau, there were 814 housing units utilized for recreational, seasonal, and occasional purposes. If we use the figure that the average American family has 2 parents and 2.1 children, for a total of 4.1 people per family, we arrive at over 3,200 additional people in the area during the tourist season. However, it is unlikely that such housing is utilized at such a rate as second homes are more likely to be owned by families with children who have left the house and/or retirees. We therefore calculated the potential summer population of each town and the area as a whole utilizing a multiplier of 3.75. This figure yields a summer population in recreational housing of slightly over 3,000. It should be noted that the Census Bureau also allowed for a category of “Vacant Housing – Other” that plausibly refers to temporary vacation rentals, although this is not defined well enough to yield an exact number. We have nevertheless excluded this category from our estimates on the basis that we have accounted for such rentals in the accommodations survey discussed below.

Due to limitations in the available data, it is not possible to accurately estimate the number of recreational housing units that have been converted to temporary “dreams park” type rentals. Indeed, the line between a recreational home and such a rental is likely quite thin as families choose to rent the unit during weeks when they plan to be elsewhere. That said, it is likely that a significant proportion of those who own such

properties may choose to utilize the property for their own recreation. We have estimated on this basis that the recreational housing population should be cut in approximately half to account for this discrepancy, yielding an area-wide population of **1,527**. Assuming little significant growth in this sector since the 2000 census, we can add this number to the 2005 population estimate to arrive at a base population of **11,559** during the peak summer season.

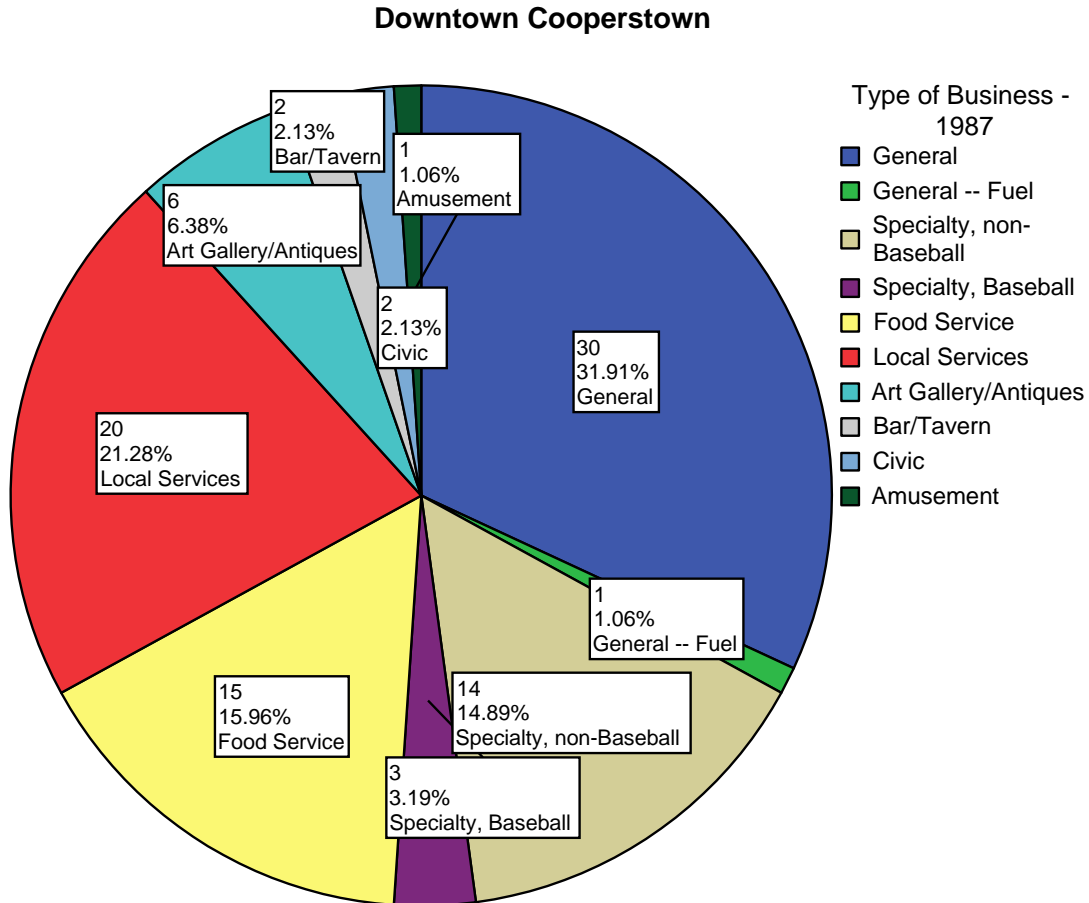
Table 3: Potential Tourist Population by Municipality, 2007

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Hotel/Motel</u>	<u>Inn/B&amp;B</u>	<u>Private Accommodations</u>	<u>Camps/Campgrounds</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Cooperstown	855	306	43	0	1,204
Hartwick	1,062	145	322	2,110	3,639
Middlefield	0	124	75	0	199
Otsego	252	24	167	0	443
Springfield	327	6	6	900	1,239
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,496</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>613</b>	<b>3,010</b>	<b>6,724</b>

As shown in table 3, the number of potential tourists staying at accommodations in the village and the surrounding townships is 6,724. This figure represents the total number of people who can stay in the area if each of the accommodations units is filled to capacity. As it is unlikely that each unit that can, for instance, comfortably hold four visitors will in fact have four visitors, it is necessary to reduce the figure still more. A common figure used by the Hotel Industry is eighty percent, and although it is normally applied to units themselves, we will use it here as well. After reducing our figure by 20 percent, we are left with a more realistic **5,379**. This yields a total approximate peak summer population for Cooperstown and its surrounding towns of **16,938** – an increase of 68.8 percent.

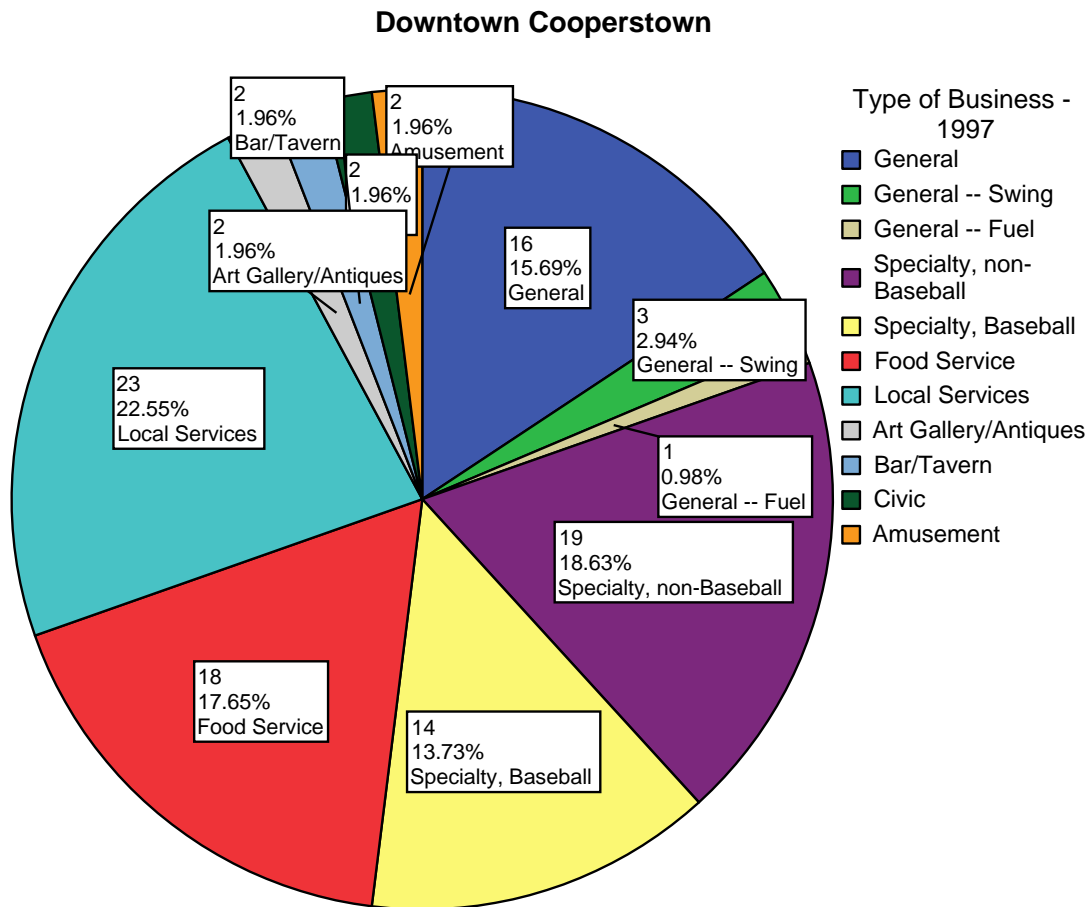
*Retail Trends in Major Retail Districts*

Figure 6: Types of Business in Downtown Cooperstown, 1987



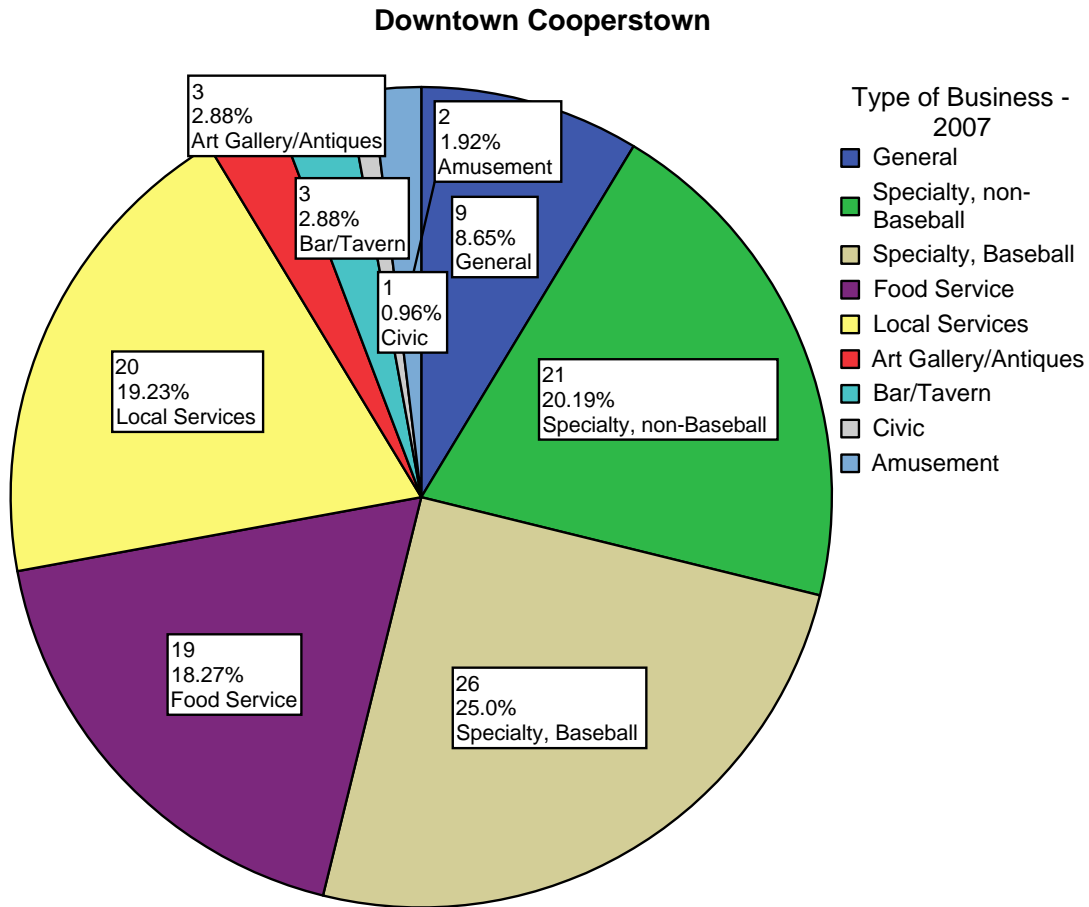
It is notable that although about 32 percent of downtown Cooperstown’s retail base was classified as “General” in 1987, it is also notable that nearly a quarter of the area’s retail was tourism directed in at least some way, specifically in the Specialty (both classes), art gallery and antiques, and to some degree the food service sectors. Nevertheless, it is also noticeable that Specialty Baseball businesses accounted for only three percent of downtown’s retail base.

Figure 7: Types of Business in Downtown Cooperstown, 1997



By 1997, we see some decline in General retail – which mirrors trends in other communities of Cooperstown’s size – and an increase in tourism-related business. Specialty Retail increases in both sectors, but is strongest in Specialty Baseball businesses due to a niche in baseball-oriented tourism.

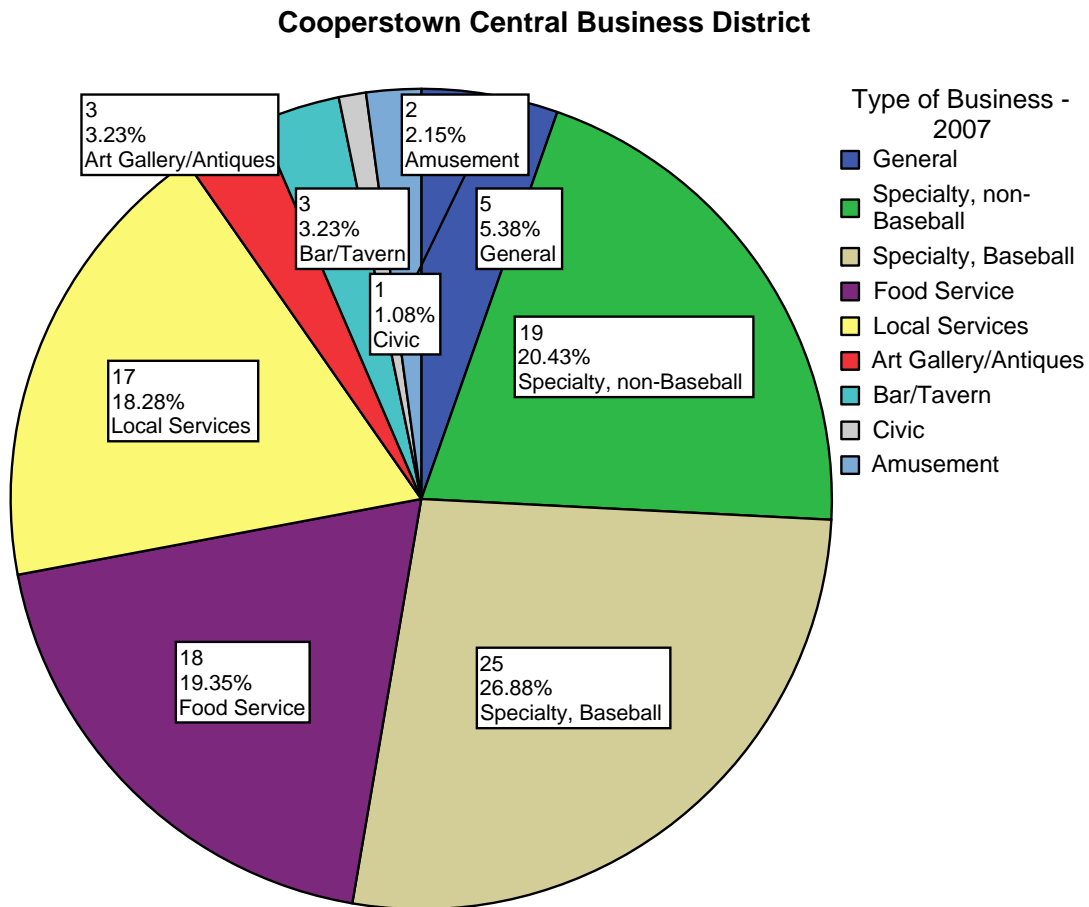
Figure 8: Types of Business in Downtown Cooperstown, 2007



By 2007, nearly half of downtown Cooperstown’s retail base is characterized by tourism-oriented stores, the largest sector of which is Specialty Baseball. This growth has not necessarily come at the expense of General Business but rather has filled the storefronts of general retail stores that closed for other reasons, such as retirements of unsuccessful attempts to compete against big box stores in larger communities. This is important as a common sentiment in the community is that baseball “drove out” general business, but the sequence (as discussed in the 2003 report) involved a decline in general

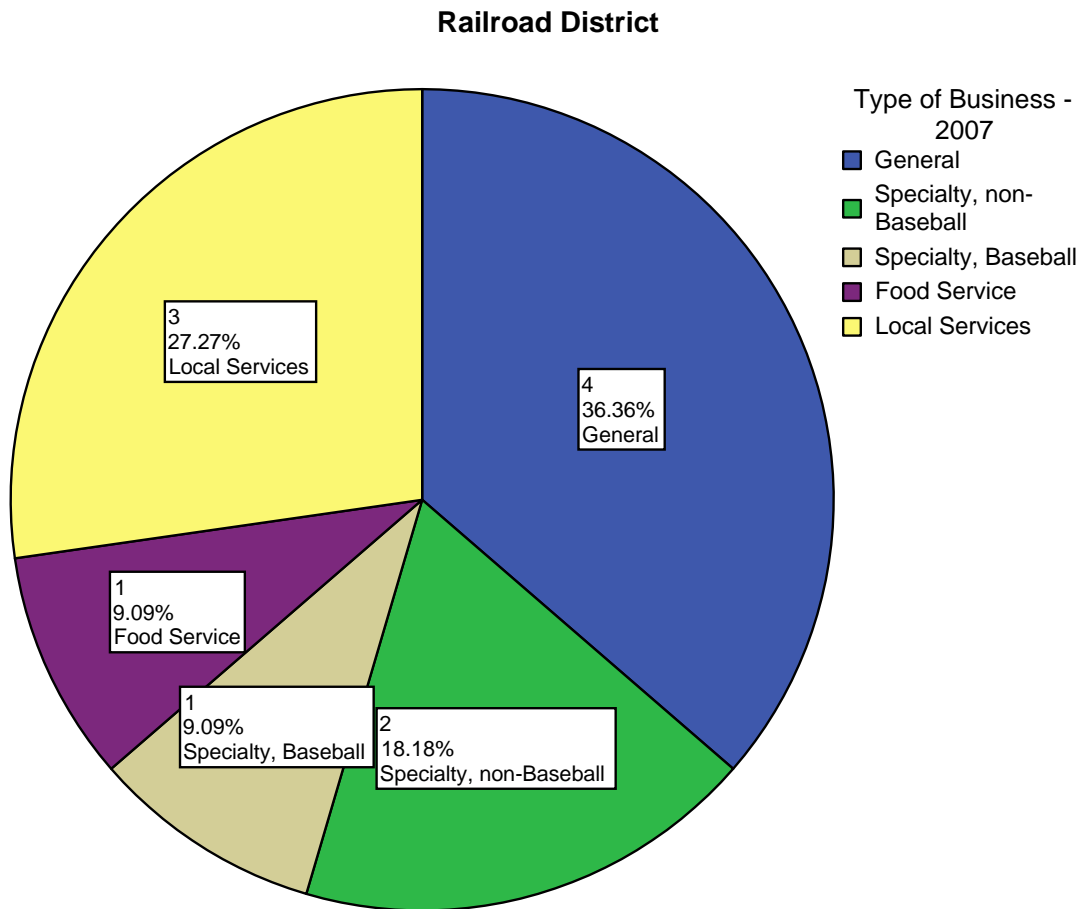
businesses followed by tourism expanding into those empty stores. Local services constituted about twenty percent of the downtown economy in all three years.

Figure 9: Types of Business in Cooperstown's Central Business District, 2007



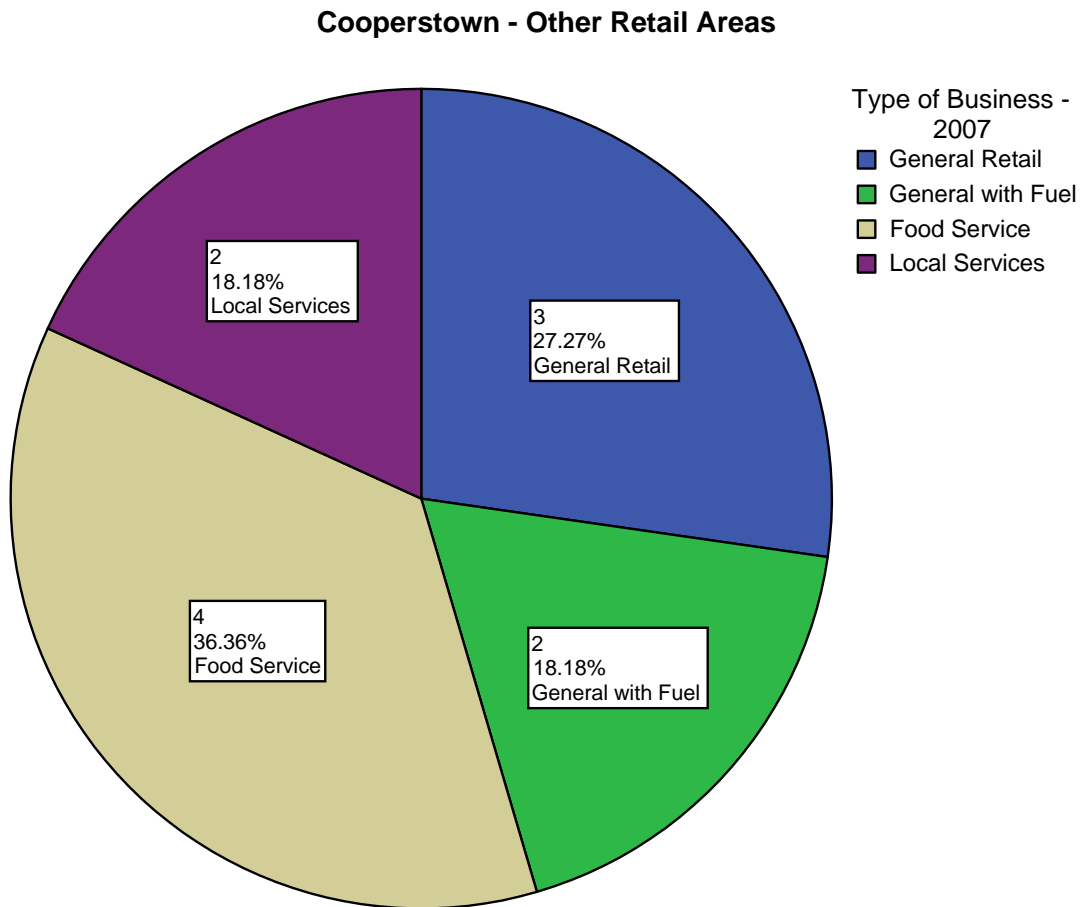
Trends in the Central Business District approximately mirror those for the downtown as a whole. This is due to the comparatively larger size of the area. Significantly, all but one of the Specialty Baseball businesses are located in this area, suggesting that baseball has centralized along Main Street.

Figure 10: Types of Business in Cooperstown's Railroad District, 2007



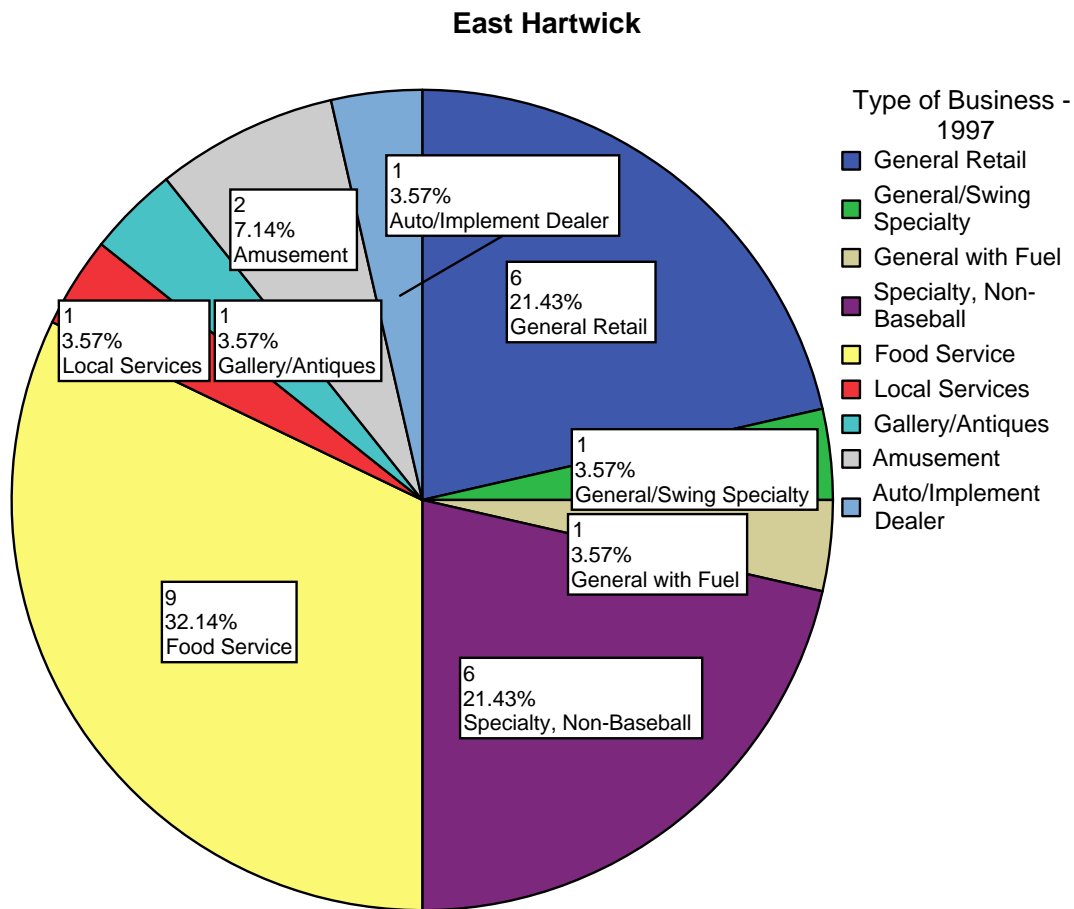
Of the eleven businesses in the Railroad District in 2007, about one-third were general and another third were local services. Significantly, there was only one Specialty-Baseball business, indicating that such businesses perform best in the Central Business District.

Figure 11: Types of Business in Cooperstown's Other Retail Areas, 2007



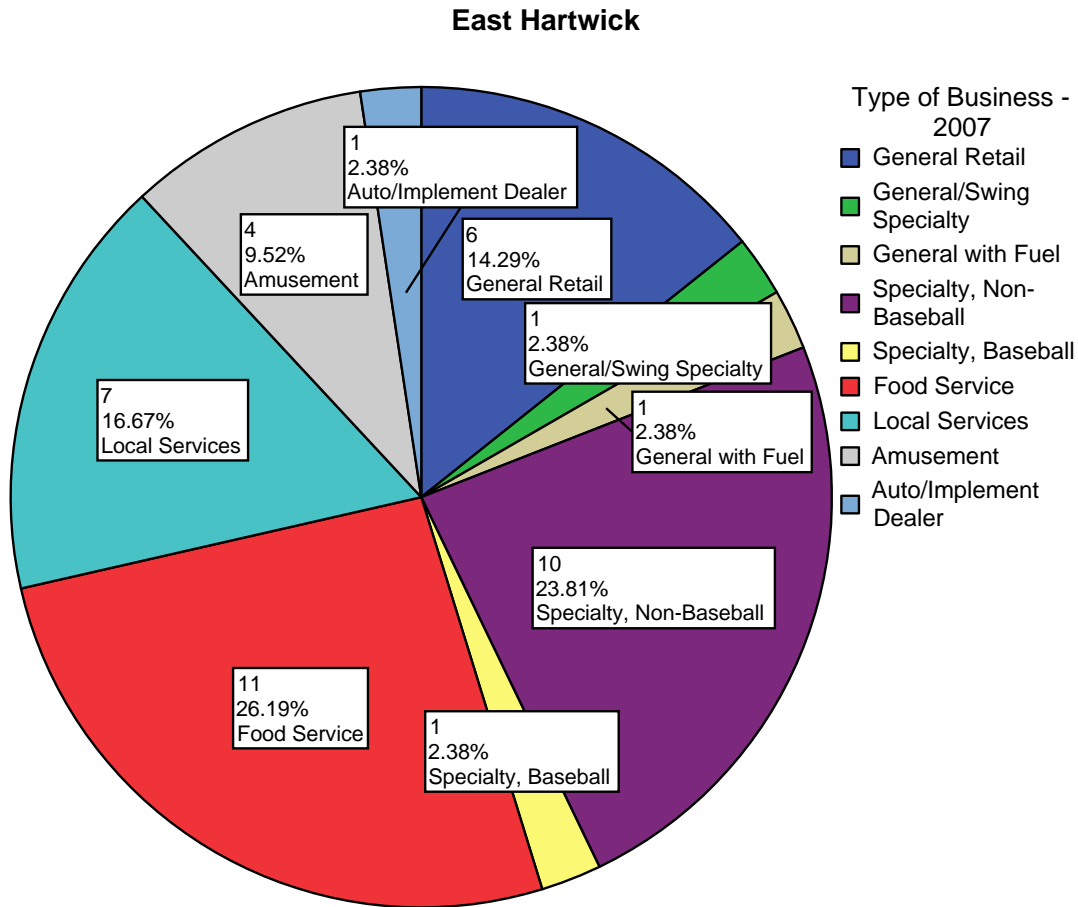
Given trends in downtown Cooperstown, it is not surprising that the remainder of the village is apparently given over to retail activities oriented toward the community, such as a grocery store and gas stations. Such business do, of course, benefit from the tourism economy, but are more dependent on the local population than the specialty stores of downtown.

Figure 12: Types of Business in East Hartwick Corridor, 1997



There were 26 retail businesses along the East Hartwick corridor in 1997, most of which were oriented toward the local community. The results of this early survey prompted Alex Thomas to suggest that the corridor would continue to develop as a community-oriented retail district to make up for the dominance of tourism-oriented shops in downtown Cooperstown (see Thomas, 1998).

Figure 13: Types of Business in East Hartwick Corridor, 2007



I was wrong in 1998. In 2007, there were 42 retail establishments in the corridor – still only half of those in downtown Cooperstown – but an increase of 15 (58 percent). Although the number of Specialty Baseball shops was small (only one), reflective of the high density of the shops downtown, the East Hartwick corridor witnessed increases in amusements, Specialty Non-Baseball shops, and Food Services. In some cases, this growth reflects the advantageous location of a suburban style strip over a densely nucleated downtown area – miniature golf and drive-in style restaurants have more space along the strip. A sector not addressed in the retail data but apparent from the lodging

data above is that his corridor experienced considerable growth in lodging and, as such, will likely experience more growth in amusements, food services, and other such businesses in the future. There was also some growth in local services, indicating that the strip is also a desirable location for community oriented retail and services as well.

## DISCUSSION

The typical visitor to the Cooperstown area defies what we assume them to be. Only one out of three tourists stay in Cooperstown – the majority (54%) stay in the town of Hartwick. Another third stay in the town of Springfield. As such, the average tourist is highly mobile and dependent on the automobile. Future plans for tourism in the region should account for this basic fact.

Although not addressed directly in this report, there has been considerable growth in accommodations for tourists. Such recent growth has largely been due to the success of the Cooperstown Dreams Park and similar local ventures, and as such a continued upward trend in demand for accommodations should not be assumed. The exact equilibrium point is difficult to ascertain, and is highly dependent upon the values of the analyst. If the goal is a range of accommodations options, including the private homes of local entrepreneurs, then the area has likely reached an equilibrium already. If the goal is for most visitors to be housed in the immediate vicinity of Cooperstown, then hotel growth in Oneonta as well as anecdotal evidence of visitors staying as far away as Utica, Albany and Binghamton is indicative that such an equilibrium has not been reached. If the goal is simply to add onto the existing accommodations infrastructure that includes lakeside motels and campgrounds, then equilibrium has been reached, but if the goal is a

thoroughly modern hotel infrastructure then the area is not at equilibrium. To summarize the sentiments of the early sociologist Max Weber, one's definition of any scientific term is based upon the values one brings to the question, and with the question of whether the Cooperstown area has reached an equilibrium in regard to its accommodations infrastructure, it depends upon the goals of the people of the region.

Despite the uncertainty in defining the equilibrium point for accommodations, two basic dynamics can guide one in determining the staying power of accommodations in the region. It is possible that the addition of more (and less expensive) lodging units can make the area more attractive for non-baseball visitors, particularly during the "off-season," and thus newer hotels may still be attractive for the region as a whole. That said, as much of the growth in tourism in general has been highly tilted toward summer vacation, the market is currently highly asymmetrical. This means that although profit margins per room are quite high during the summer, they dwindle during the fall and spring and are quite low, even operating at a loss, during the winter months.

Regardless of whether the area can handle more lodging units during the summer, it is more desirable for the area economy overall to expand the number of tourists during the fall and spring, even into winter if possible. This idea is not new:

Efforts to extend the active tourist season should be continued, perhaps with a renewed emphasis on winter sports. In addition, the utilization of the Hartwick Seminary strip could include new attractions that would not fit aesthetically in the village but could provide an added incentive for tourists to visit the area, specifically a water or amusement park and factory outlets. Such attractions are often found in Cooperstown's competitors, notably Lake George. Such efforts in Hartwick Seminary could be utilized to provide a modernized infrastructure while preserving the character of the village and other parts of the area. To this end, arrangements should be made to preserve the greenbelt surrounding the village. (Thomas et al, 2003, 18)

Similarly, local government (both county and town) could take a role toward a wider tourism population by utilizing Bed Tax revenue to create and maintain such a comprehensive trail system that would create new entertainment options for both residents and visitors alike and attract non-baseball tourists throughout the year. The existing network of state and county forestland as well as abandoned rail lines, such as the Southern New York Railway line, would create an excellent start to such a system.

Furthermore, such an expansion should utilize a wider number of communities. The City of Oneonta, for instance, has an infrastructure of eateries, pubs, and other entertainment options that could serve as a foundation for area tourism. Younger visitors (e.g., twenties and early thirties) could start visiting Oneonta and driving to other areas for attractions (such as the Baseball Hall of Fame), “graduate” to visiting Cooperstown as the family-oriented community when they have children, and possibly explore retirement options in the region as they age. Obviously, such a coordinated program would require coordination not only in marketing, but among various government agencies and private interests.

Future development should attempt to mitigate negative consequences as much as possible. For example, declines in enrollment at Milford Central School are evidently because of the displacement of rental and other types of housing from the housing market and into the accommodations industry. It seems likely that the slowing of the growth rate in the town of Hartwick is due to the same trends in the accommodations industry. This is not only a problem in the short term as residents, especially the poor, are displaced from area homes. It also points to a possible bubble in the local real estate market. As the number of housing units for accommodations has increased in the study area, a higher

proportion has been shifted into temporary housing for tourists during the summer. Should the increase in hotel/motel rooms overcome the growth in tourists, less desirable temporary housing will become less profitable and be put on the housing market. If a high number of such properties are put up for sale in a short period, housing values could be threatened. (A similar vulnerability exists with second homes as well).

The general answer to a number of these conditions is increased coordination and communication among municipalities and private industry. A plan for tourism in the region should be developed by a committee involving all the relevant players, and a truly regional approach should be developed. One aspect of this should be “rebranding” the region, perhaps with a locally significant name such as the “Cooper Hills” to tie the region to its history. Another would be rebranding retail areas – perhaps route 28 in the East Hartwick corridor could be renamed the “Doubleday Highway.” But marketing is not enough: a plan for widening the tourism season in a socially responsible way, for adding to the infrastructure and increasing the entertainment options for area residents and tourists alike, and creating a multiple attraction tourism base is necessary as well.

#### FURTHER READING<sup>1</sup>

There are additional resources that area residents might find helpful. Three books have examined the development of tourism in the Cooperstown area. *A Legend for the Legendary* (Vlasich, 1990) examines the origins and growth of the Baseball Hall of Fame. An analysis of the cultural impact of baseball tourism in Cooperstown and Dyersville, Iowa is found in *From Cooperstown to Dyersville* (Springwood, 1996). More recently, the causes and impact of tourism and more general changes in the area economy

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Thomas et al, 2003.

is discussed in *In Gotham's Shadow* (Thomas, 2003). Fitchen's (1991) *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places* examines changes in the way rural upstate New Yorkers experience community, and Thomas' (1999) article *Untowning Hartwick* does the same more locally.

More broadly, there are certain books that would be of interest for one seeking to understand more about the nature of recent changes in rural communities around the country. The root causes of economic changes are presented in the edited reader, *Forgotten Places* (Lyson & Falk, 1993). Another reader, *Changing Rural Social Systems* (Johnson & Wang, 1997), discusses such changes with an eye toward how communities from are adapting to new challenges. Young's (1999) *Small Towns in Multilevel Reality* examines the impact of recent demographic changes on the sense of community found in small towns generally. Two good books that examine the role of the museum in tourism and the economy are Handler & Gable (1997) *The New History in an Old Museum* and Kirshenblatt-Gimlet's (1998) *Destination Culture*. There are numerous studies of retail shopping patterns that are worth reading, including Pinkerton et al (1995) *Inshopping by Residents of Small Communities*, Brown et al (1996) *Outshopping and the Viability of Rural Communities as Service/Trade Centers*, and Miller & Kean (1997) *Factors Contributing to Inshopping Behavior in Rural Trade Area: Implications for Local Retailers*. A similar but more limited survey about where residents of Hartwick shop was conducted in 2001 (Thomas et al, 2002).

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