

**Cooperstown Retail Activity, 1997-2001**

**General Report**

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## SUGGESTED CITATION

Thomas, Alexander R. & Lori A. Cardona. 2002. *Retail in Greater Cooperstown: 1997 & 2001*. Oneonta, N. Y.: SUNY Oneonta Center for Social Science Research.

## **Introduction**

Tourism has had a dramatic impact on the economy of central Otsego County. Attracted initially during the nineteenth century to Otsego Lake and the panache of James Fenimore Cooper, the number of attractions and visitors has ballooned during the past half-century (Thomas, 2002). The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of tourism and the more broad restructuring of the area economy.

## **Method**

Businesses in the area are scattered about the rural countryside as well as centered in urbanized settings. Cooperstown, Fly Creek/Oaksville, and Hartwick are historic centers for economic activity. A fourth area, consisting of an agglomeration of three contiguously developed urbanized settings -- Hartwick Seminary, Hyde Park, and Index - - is here classified as the East Hartwick corridor due to its location along New York Route 28 in the Town of Hartwick. In order to have a more manageable population, the survey was limited to the four areas of business concentration noted above. The village of Cooperstown was further split into Downtown, comprising the Central Business District along Main, Chestnut, and Pioneer Streets as well as several alleys, and the remainder of the village. While the survey does not represent every business, it does represent the vast majority of retail and food service establishments in the area, and thus a good indicator of broader retail trends.

The survey was further limited to those establishments specializing in retail and food service, as it is in these sectors of the economy that the most social interaction takes place. Antique dealers are particularly difficult to classify as some are professionally

operated retail establishments and others are operated from the proprietor's barn on weekends or by appointment only; as such, these businesses were excluded.

The remaining businesses were classified into one of six categories: 1) General; 2) General-swing; 3) General-fuel; 4) Specialty, non-baseball; 5) Specialty, baseball; and 6) Food service.

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. In those cases where a significant portion of the store is given over to the sale of tourism related goods, it is designated as "General-Swing." General merchandise businesses normally rely on tourism to sustain revenues; for example, a grocery store often sells food and supplies for picnicking, camping, and other similar activities, but the primary purpose of the store is the provision of groceries. In contrast, a "general-swing" business sells general merchandise as well as a significant number of souvenirs and other tourism related merchandise. General stores that supply automotive fuels are designated "General-Fuel." This category does not include businesses that sell fuel as the primary source of revenue.

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 are classified as specialty stores, although a store selling only clothes is classified "General." Businesses that 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.

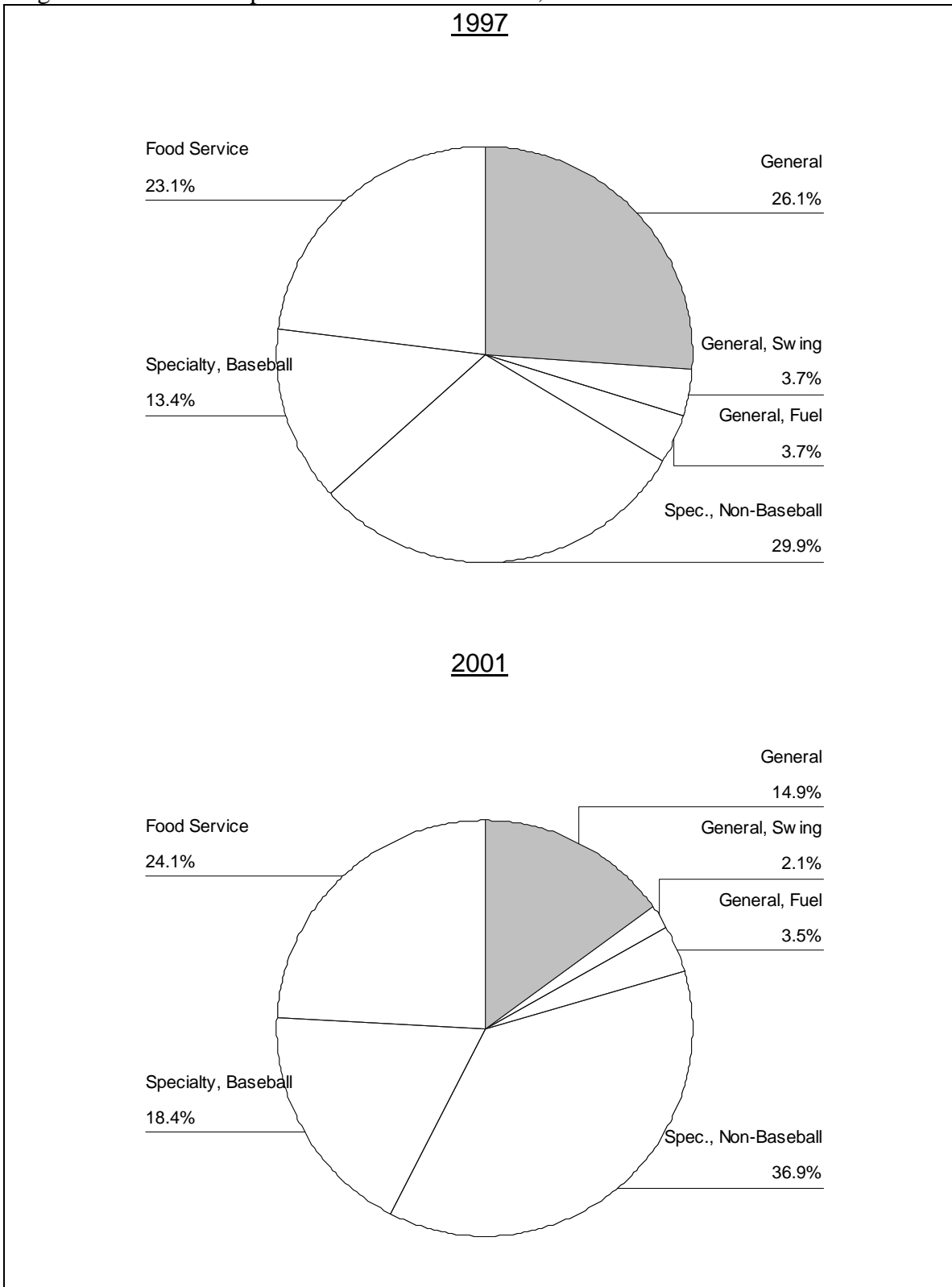
Food Service establishments include businesses whose primary purpose is the preparation and service of food for consumption.

Data was collected during the summer of 1997 (see Thomas, 1998) and the summer of 2001. In order to ensure intercoder reliability, extensive training and discussion was employed between the two coders.

## **Results**

In the area overall, the total number of coded businesses grew from 134 to 141. During this same four years, the proportion of area businesses classified as General fell from roughly a third (33.5 percent) of the total to only a fifth (20.5 percent). This was due primarily to an increase in tourism related retail outlets. Specialty, Non-Baseball businesses increased from 29.9 percent of those coded in 1997 to 36.9 percent of those coded in 2001. Similarly, Specialty, Baseball businesses increased their share of the area retail economy from 13.4 percent in 1997 to 18.4 percent in 2001. Food service establishments remained stable between 1997 and 2001 (23.1% and 24.1%, respectively). The results are presented in Figure One.

Figure 1: Overall Composition of Area Businesses, 1997 & 2001



The number of businesses in downtown Cooperstown was quite stable, a function of the fact that the number of available storefronts did not change. There was a slight decline in the number of coded businesses in the village outside of the central business district, but this was due primarily to changes in the functions of some available spaces (e.g., coded business in 1997, office space in 2001) and not an actual decline in economic activity during this time period. The number of businesses in Fly Creek and Hartwick also remained stable during this time period (seven and five, respectively). The East Hartwick corridor experienced the most growth, growing 75 percent during the four year period. This was due, in part, to the completion of the Commons Shopping Center in Hartwick Seminary. This is shown in Figure Two.

Figure 2: Number of Coded Businesses, by Business Area

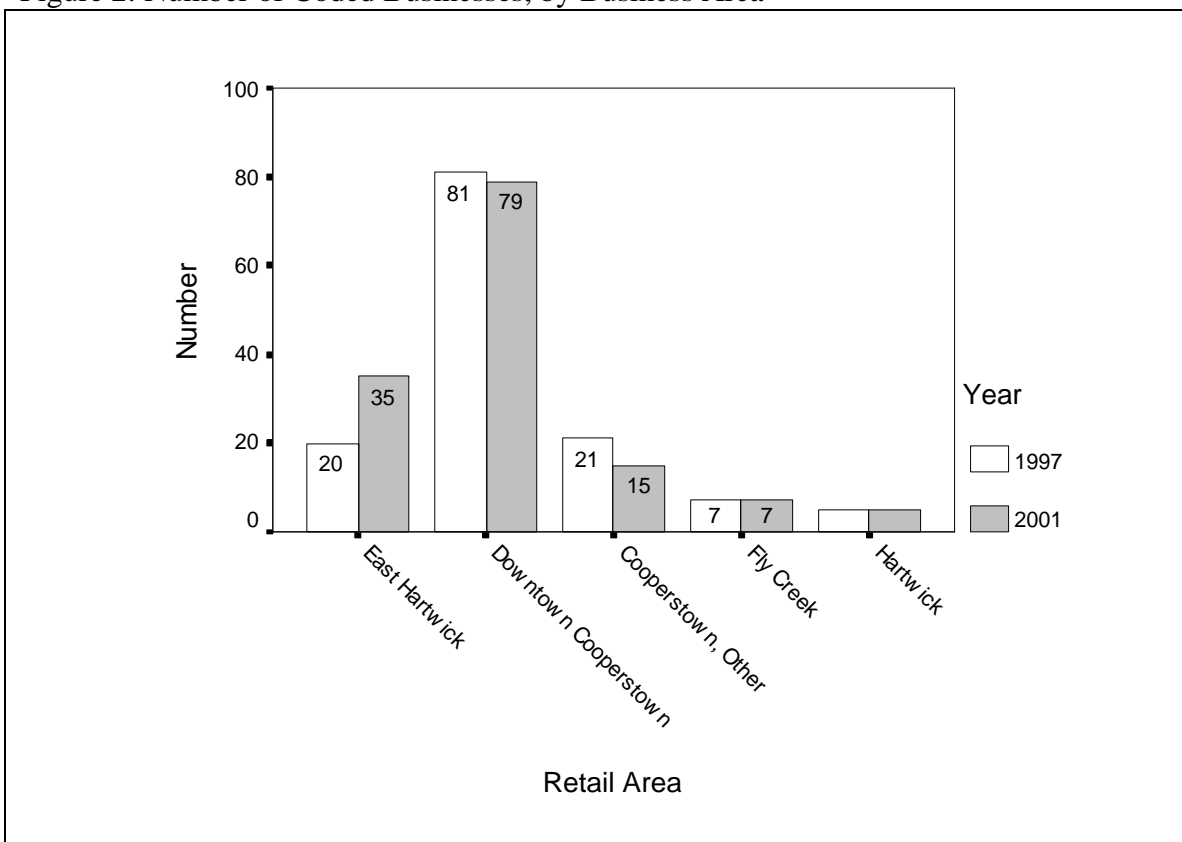


Figure 3: Types of Businesses in Downtown Cooperstown, 1997 & 2001

<b>BUSINESS TYPE</b>	<b>1997 (%)</b>	<b>2001 (%)</b>
General	10 (12.3)	7 (8.9)
General, Swing	5 (6.2)	3 (3.8)
General, Fuel	0 (0)	0 (0)
Specialty, Non-Baseball	31 (38.8)	31 (39.2)
Specialty, Baseball	17 (21.0)	21 (26.6)
Food Service	18 (22.2)	17 (21.5)
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>81 (100)</i>	<i>79 (100)</i>

As noted, the number of businesses in downtown Cooperstown has been quite stable over time. This is due to two factors: 1) there continues to be strong demand for store space in the central business district, and 2) there has been no appreciable increase in the supply of store space. As shown in Figure Three, the number of retail establishments downtown only decreased by two, a non-significant decline. The primary market of the area is tourism, as Specialty, Baseball and Food Service establishments remained unchanged and Specialty, Baseball establishments experienced growth. The number of businesses oriented primarily toward the local community (General and General, Swing) experienced a modest decline. It is likely that the downtown area could absorb an increase in the supply of useable storefronts, but that the new businesses would also serve the tourism market.

The other major area of economic activity is the East Hartwick corridor. The corridor contains less than half the number of coded establishments than downtown Cooperstown, but due to its location and character has experienced the most growth – seventy-five percent during the four year period under study. As stated earlier, this was due primarily to the completion of the Common Shopping Center. An overview of retail activity is shown in Figure Four.

Figure 4: Types of Businesses in East Hartwick, 1997 & 2001

<b>BUSINESS TYPE</b>	<b>1997 (%)</b>	<b>2001 (%)</b>
General	8 (40.0)	5 (14.3)
General, Swing	0 (0)	0 (0)
General, Fuel	1 (5.0)	1 (2.9)
Specialty, Non-Baseball	3 (15.0)	15 (42.9)
Specialty, Baseball	0 (0)	3 (8.6)
Food Service	8 (40.0)	11 (31.4)
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>20 (100)</i>	<i>35 (100)</i>

The East Hartwick corridor also shows a trend of more tourism oriented businesses, and a trend away from establishments aimed primarily at the local community. General and General, Fuel establishments experienced a modest decline between 1997 and 2001 (nine and six, respectively). All of the growth was experienced in tourism related establishments, although it should be noted that some Specialty, Non-Baseball establishments are oriented to the local community as well. This trend is likely to continue, albeit at a slower pace due to increased property values along the corridor and a slowing national economy.

### **Conclusion**

The retail base has shown growth during the past four years, although most of this growth is in tourism related sectors of the economy (Specialty, Non-Baseball, Specialty, Baseball, and Food Service). The precise benefit to the local community cannot be ascertained from the data presented here, but it can be inferred that this growth has been accompanied by increases in the local tax base and employment. The proximate advantages need to be weighed against the impact of increasing tourism in the area, especially in regard to the decreasing diversity of products and services available to the local community.

## References

Thomas, Alexander R. 1998. *Economic and Social Restructuring in a Rural Community*. Ph.D. Dissertation: Northeastern University.

Thomas, Alexander R. 2002. *In Gotham's Shadow: Globalization and Community Development in Central New York*. Albany, N. Y.: SUNY Press (Forthcoming).