

A Brief History of Gambier

by Tom Stamp
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To understand the history of the village of Gambier, one needs to understand the history of Kenyon College. Of course, the reverse is also true, because the two grew up together, like sometimes affectionate, sometimes quarrelsome siblings. There is probably no other town-gown pairing in America in which the two are so difficult to disentangle, either physically or psychologically. Without Kenyon, there would be no Gambier, and it's unlikely that the College would have survived without the village that, from the very beginning, was at its heart.

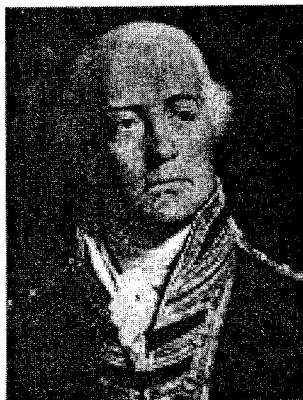


Chase as a young man

According to the Kenyon ditty that celebrates the College's and village's mutual founder, Episcopal clergyman Philander Chase, "he climbed the hill and said a prayer, and founded Kenyon College there." If only it had been as simple as that memorable couplet, which conflates the labors of several years, across thousands of miles, into thirteen words.

When Chase first came to Ohio from Connecticut in 1817, he settled in Worthington, then a small village, which had been founded by an Episcopal deacon, James Kilbourne, in 1793, ten years before Ohio became a state. At the age of forty-two, Chase had given up the comforts of the rectorship of Christ Church in Hartford, Connecticut, to follow the flood of fellow Connecticut residents into the wilds of the Western Reserve. By 1818, he had been elected the first bishop of the fledgling Diocese of Ohio.

A man with a missionary spirit, Chase knew that the newly opened land would have an ongoing need for a large supply of well-educated clergymen, which was unlikely to come from the East. So the bishop set about creating his own college and seminary to fulfill that need. With the backing of the diocese, he planned at first to locate the institutions on his own farm in Worthington. Upon reflection, though, Chase decided that it would be best to remove his students from what he called the "vice and dissipation of urban life."



Lord Gambier

Having been blocked by other bishops in his efforts to secure money in America for his enterprises, Chase set out in 1823 for England to raise funds among the evangelical Anglicans there. Although his strong enemy John Hobart, bishop of New York, was there at the same time to find support for the General Theological Seminary in New York City, Chase had an equally strong ally in the American statesman Henry Clay, who introduced him to Lord Gambier, who in turn introduced him to other prominent men and women in the evangelical movement — among them Lord Kenyon, Lady Rosse, and the religious writer Hannah More — who would become the College's earliest benefactors.

On July 24, 1825, almost exactly a year after he had sailed home from England, Chase held services in the tiny village of Mount Vernon. The next day, he rode into the countryside with the young lawyer Henry Curtis. After looking around the hilltop and taking in the magnificent views of the surrounding landscape, Chase turned to Curtis and uttered the famous words, "Well, this will do." With the approval of the diocese, Chase soon bought the 4,000-acre plot on which the hill was located as



Lord Kenyon



Lady Rosse



Hannah More

well as an additional plot of the same size. Ever the astute negotiator, Chase talked owner William Hogg into a selling price of \$3 per acre, well below the going rate, and then persuaded Hogg to remit one third to him as a gift toward his new institutions.

Just south of Kenyon's Hanna Hall, the Celtic Cross donated to the College by the Bexley Hall Class of 1902 stands on the site where Chase supposedly stood when he made the momentous decision to locate his college and village on the hilltop. The occasion is celebrated in the mural by Norris Rahming, a Kenyon art professor and administrator, that decorates the north wall of the Gambier Post Office's lobby.

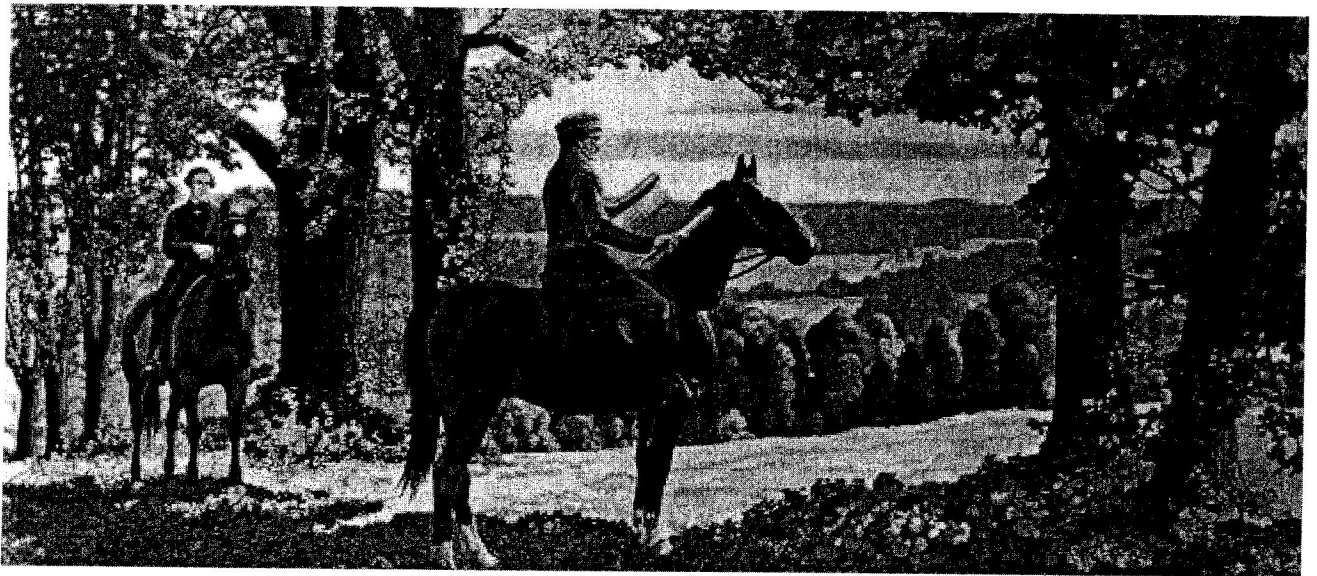
After Chase completed the purchase from Hogg of the land on which both the College and village now stand, he named them for two of the most prominent of his British benefactors – Lord Kenyon, whose name he gave to the College, and Lord Gambier, for whom he named the village. Lord Gambier (whose given name was James) was quite a famous man at the time, a British naval hero who advanced to the highest rank, admiral of the fleet. The Gambier Islands in French Polynesia, Gambier Island in British Columbia, and Mount Gambier in Australia are also named for him.

In establishing his college in the wilderness, Chase was following a distinctively American pattern, established at the birth of the College of William and Mary on a rural ridge in Virginia in 1693. The founding of that institution – and many that would follow in both pre- and post-Revolutionary America, including Chase's alma mater, Dartmouth College – followed a sequence that was to become common, in which the school preceded the town. While almost all of the English, Irish, and Scottish universities that the American colleges took as models were located in urban areas, several factors – among them a widespread distrust of cities, the ready availability of rural land, and a desire to disseminate education, particularly of a religious nature, to the frontiers – contributed to the American predilection for placing schools in settings removed from civilization.

Many in the diocese were unhappy with the chosen location, though, and there are some indications that Chase wasn't altogether charmed by the site, which was probably a bit less civilized, and perhaps a bit more isolated, than even he might have liked. (He insisted, for example, upon calling Owl Creek – what we now know as the Kokosing – the Vernon River, perhaps to give it a name less redolent of the frontier.) Nevertheless, he immediately set about carving a college out of the 4,000 acres of wilderness that the diocese had purchased. Over time, more than 3,000 of the 4,000 acres, plus the additional 4,000 bought as an investment, would be sold off to support the institution's operations.

The contract for the 8,000-acre tract bought by Philander Chase was approved by the diocese in June 1826. The work of clearing the land and erecting the first temporary buildings for both the college and the village began that summer. Those first rough structures were centered in the area around the well, near the current intersection of Wiggin Street with Chase and Gaskin avenues, and on what is now the front lawn of the chapel.

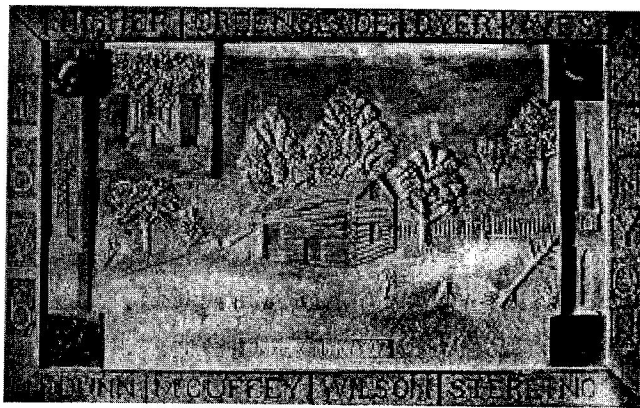
In June 1828, Kenyon formally transferred its operations from Worthington to Gambier, where the faculty members and students alike moved into a group of incommodious, often



Norris Rahming's mural of Curtis (left) and Chase arriving on the hilltop

unfurnished buildings. A student named Heman (sic) Dyer, who came to the College in 1829, offered a telling account, in his letters home, of those early years. He wrote to his parents that, upon his arrival, he "saw a pair of feet and legs sticking out some distance through a crack in the boards" at one of the houses. When the student to whom they belonged asked what he was doing, he replied, "I am trying to get my feet warm in the sun." At least in those times, it must have seemed that the founder had traded "vice and dissipation" for discomfort and privation.

When Chase made his first appearance in his new domain, there was, to his surprise, already one thriving business, supported by the local squatters and perhaps a harbinger of the ultimate futility of Chase's often-expressed desire to be insulated from the temptations he associated with urban life. That business was a rudimentary distillery, which Chase the temperance man soon closed and, to use a modern word, repurposed as the College's laundry.



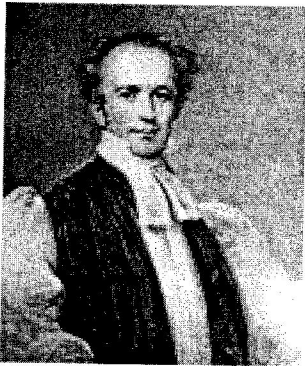
A woodcut of Chase's first cabin in Gambier (ca. 1827)

In its earliest years, Gambier's primary industry, aside from education, was agriculture. By 1830, there were more than one hundred twenty acres in corn and wheat, with additional fields in oats and rye. Seven hundred acres had been fenced and sown with clover and timothy for the feeding of cattle and oxen, with many of both already on hand and plans for as many as one thousand cattle to provide milk and meat. A grist mill and a saw mill had also been built, two essential operations without which, Chase admitted, "the College never could have succeeded."

In addition to the people employed in these businesses, there were those engaged in lumbering and quarrying. Others found employment in blacksmith's, carpenter's, and shoemaker's shops, in the general store, and in the hotel, which Chase always referred to as the "house for strangers." In his 1924 history of Kenyon, George Franklin Smythe notes Gambier's similarity, at this time in its history, to the great monasteries of the Middle Ages, "planted in a remote spot, with its farms, its dairies, its mills, its workshops, its guest house, its domestic establishment, its scholars, its laboring brethren, and its autocratic abbot."

Indeed, as he was in almost all things, Chase was dictatorial and unyielding with regard to any businesses operating in the village. Every evening, he gathered the headmen to hear their reports and issue his orders. Chase himself served not only as president of Gambier's educational enterprises but also as postmaster, rector of Harcourt Parish, chief preacher for both the College and village, and president of the Bible Society, the Sunday School Society, and the Temperance Society. Behind his back, the bishop was called "His Royal Highness" by Kenyon faculty members and local settlers alike.

But Chase's sojourn in the village he founded was destined to be a brief one. Because of a series of disagreements with the College's board and faculty, the effects of which were exacerbated by his constant anxiety about financial matters, Chase resigned as bishop of Ohio and president of Kenyon and the seminary in 1831. After a brief time in Michigan, he set out for Illinois, where he was elected bishop in 1835 and established another institution, Jubilee College, near Peoria. Chase died at his home there, called "Robin's Nest," at the age of seventy-seven in 1852. Jubilee, which was clearly modeled on Kenyon both architecturally and organizationally, survived for another sixteen years, closing in 1868, a little more than a quarter century after its founding.

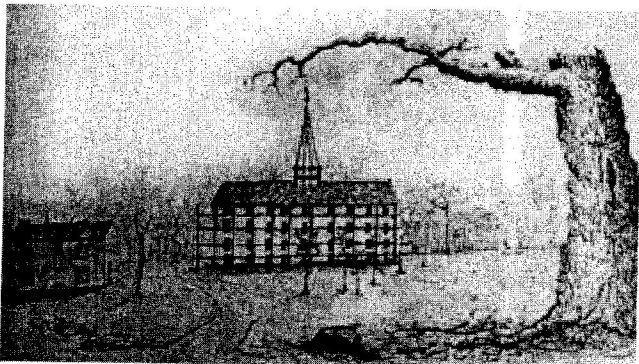


Charles McIlwaine

In a memoir of her long and eventful life, Esther Ann Johnson Turner, known as Ann, recalled the time spent by her family in Gambier in the mid 1830s, shortly after Chase's departure, when the College was thriving under the leadership of Charles Pettit McIlwaine, the second bishop of Ohio, and the village was beginning to rise from its status as a wilderness outpost. Her father, Gurdon Collins Johnson, was employed by the College as manager of its boarding house, known as "74" or "Old 74." There are various explanations for the name of the 1830 structure, which was located across Middle Path from Rosse Hall and originally served as the Kenyon Grammar School. According to the 1881 edition of the *History of Knox County*, the "large, unsightly frame building" was named for its 74-foot length, but other sources suggest that the name reflected

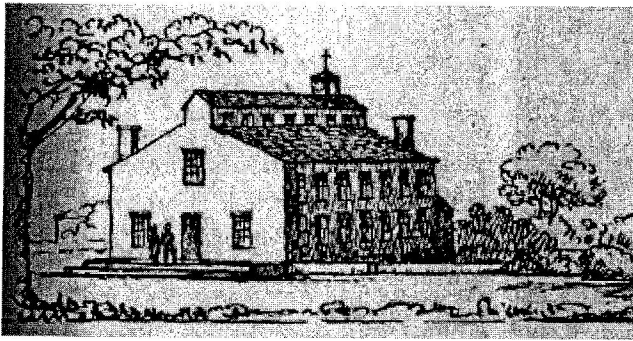
the number of windows or the resemblance to a certain type of fighting ship.

Ann Johnson Turner recalled a story told by Henry Caswall, one of the College's first alumni, that demonstrates the suspicions harbored by the area's residents. On his way to Gambier, Caswall stopped to spend the night with a local farmer and his family, who fed him and made him feel welcome. Caswall's recollection continues: "After the repast, I entered freely into conversation with the family. Accidentally mentioning Gambier as my residence, I perceived the old man suddenly become silent and reserved. In the morning, as I prepared to depart and as I was about to leave the house, the old man freely opened his mind and in a manner which left no doubt as to the strength of his feelings. He told me he regarded Kenyon College as imminently dangerous to the



Old Kenyon in 1829: Fortress-like?

country. 'I fought the British in the Revolutionary War,' he said. 'I again encountered them in the last war, and I know something of their character. I know they would not contribute so many thousands to build a college in Ohio without a sinister object. I am convinced that Bishop Chase is an agent employed by them to introduce British domination here. The college' – and by that he meant the building we now know as Old Kenyon – "is really a fortress, the scholars



"Old 74," first the Kenyon Grammar School, then a boarding-house for students

soldiers in disguise, and when you think you have the opportunity, you will throw off the mask and proclaim the king of England!' I endeavored to show him the absurdity of his opinion, but as he only grew more angry, I desisted. I believe his prejudices are not entirely peculiar to himself."

Ann's reminiscences reveal an easy commerce among the families of Kenyon's leaders, those of other local residents, and the students at the grammar school, college, and seminary. Ann had memories of many Kenyon

men who went on to achieve fame, including Rutherford B. Hayes, whose flute-playing was often the first thing she heard in the morning. "He would stand at his window," she recalled, "the bull's eye high up and to the left of the entrance to Old Kenyon, and play: 'Now the shades of night are gone; now the morning light has come. Lord may we be thine today; drive the shades of sin away.'"

After Ann's father discovered there was no money to be made in running the College's boardinghouse – at a weekly rate, set by the trustees, of \$1.25 per student – the family moved to its own house in Gambier, where a small number of boarders continued to lodge. The Johnsons' neighbors in the village included the Sawers, an English couple that started a bakery and lunchroom for students. Ann remembered that "their oyster stews were very tempting on cold winter days, and there was nothing quite so good as Mrs. Sawyer's spruce beer on hot summer ones."

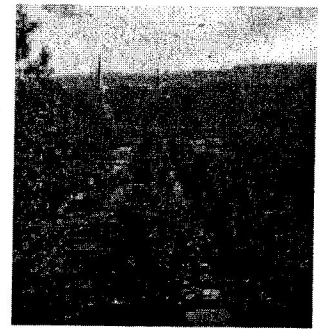
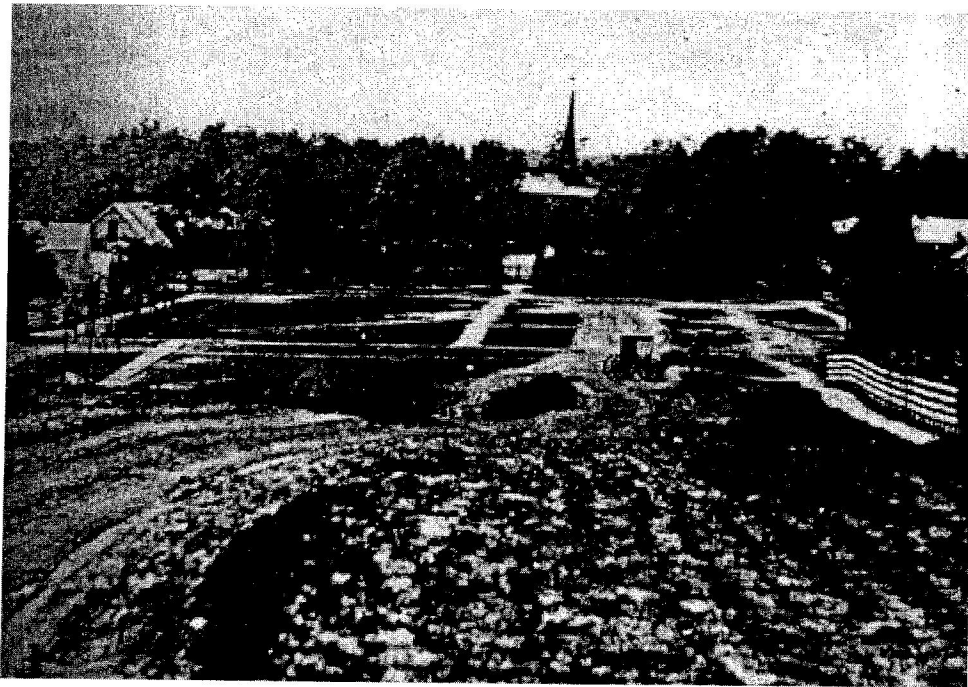
Ann's summers, and those of her Gambier family members and friends, were filled with horseback rides and picnics on the banks of the Kokosing. In the winters, there were sledding and sleighing parties and ice-skating on the river. She and her female friends attended public school, while many of the boys attended the Kenyon Grammar School. Ann and several other girls also took instruction from the wives of professors in subjects not taught in school and further supplemented their education by reading books in the College library, which was open to all.

Although the Johnsons had moved to Ohio from Keene, New Hampshire, because of the greater educational opportunities for their sons in Gambier, many of those opportunities were unavailable to their daughters, who were younger. As a result, Gurdon Collins Johnson accepted a job as a clerk in Granville, where a female seminary had been established, and the family moved there in 1840.



David Bates Douglass

When David Bates Douglass arrived in Gambier that year as the College's third president, he found three major buildings on the hilltop – Old Kenyon and Rosse and Bexley halls – along with several private residences, numerous temporary or incomplete structures, and a general air of disarray. While Ann Johnson Turner may have looked back on her childhood in Gambier as an idyll in a rural Eden, Douglass saw only piles of discarded building materials sitting next to rotting stumps. The "investigating snouts of roving swine," to use Kenyon historian George Franklin Smythe's colorful description, had seen to it that no seedling was able to become firmly rooted. The ideal of the "campus beautiful" had been lost in the College's mid-century scramble for solvency, but Douglass was determined that it would be regained. A former West Point professor and a skilled engineer with a passion for order, he laid out the "College Park," constructed the pillars and gates, and built Middle Path from there to Old Kenyon.



An early photo, taken prior to the 1860-61 extension of Middle Path to Bexley Hall, shows the village mired in mud. Photos from later in the 1860s show the completed path, before and after tree-planting.

Despite Douglass's efforts, much of the village of Gambier was still engulfed in mud for many months of the year. Gregory Thurston Bedell, who became the third bishop of Ohio in 1859, furthered Douglass's goals by extending Middle Path northward from the gateposts to Bexley Hall and planting trees along its length. His wish was that the northern portion of the path, constructed in 1860 and 1861, would be called "The Bishop's Walk." That desire went unfulfilled, though, with the entirety called Middle Path, or in some corners Center Path, almost from the

outset, along its complete length of about five-eighths of a mile.

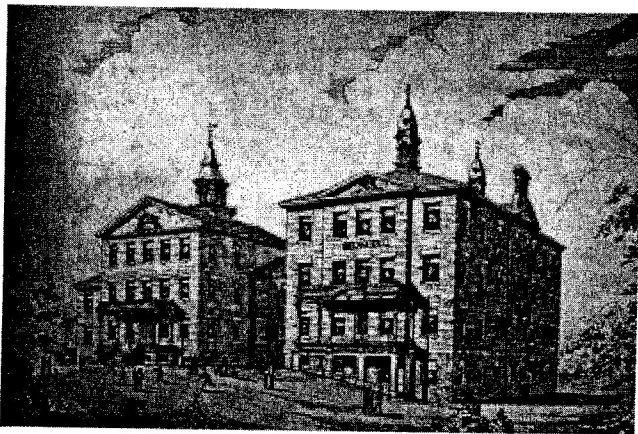
On March 15, 1850, the village was incorporated by an act of the legislature. The first "town council," established at the same time, began producing ordinances, one of the first of which prohibited "the sale of ardent spirits, except upon a physician's prescription," to govern life in the village. The incorporation of the village was a consequence of the College's decision a few years earlier to begin selling some of its land on the hilltop to raise funds for the endowment, which meant that for the first time there were landowners in Gambier other than Kenyon.



Clifford Place

One of the earliest commercial buildings constructed on property purchased from the College was the store at the corner of Gaskin Avenue and Wiggin Street, erected in 1840 by Baldwin Norton. By the 1860s, it was operated by S.R. Doolittle, who would play a leading role in Gambier's commercial community over the next several decades. Doolittle was married to Sophia Texas Sawyer, a daughter of the Sawers mentioned earlier, who still kept a restaurant and ice-cream parlor in a cottage on Wiggin Street to the east of their son-in-law's store. In 1869, Doolittle built his own store north of the older one, which was taken over by a Mr. Harnwell and then by Henry Wright, a son of Robert Wright, the master carpenter who built Clifford Place and more than sixty other

structures in the village and its vicinity. In addition to his career as a storekeeper, Henry Wright was also a carpenter and the village's sole undertaker. His sister, Emma Wright, served for many years as Kenyon's librarian.

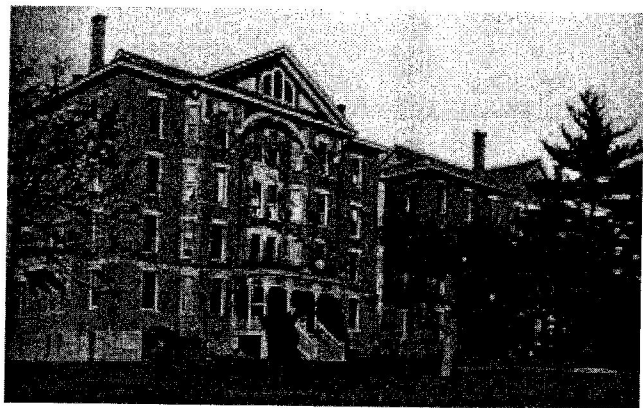


Milnor (left) and Delano halls at the Kenyon Military Academy

Throughout the nineteenth century, Gambier added to its reputation as an educational center with the founding of several other institutions, including the Harcourt Place School for Boys, the Kenyon Military Academy, and the Harcourt Place School for Girls, all of which were thriving enterprises for at least several decades of their existence. The earliest of these, the Harcourt Place School for Boys, operated by College and seminary graduate Reverend Dr. Alfred Blake and his wife, opened in 1852 in a large and beautiful house north of the village center and just west of Chase Avenue that had been the home of Charles Pettit

McIlvaine and his family. Hugely popular, the Harcourt Place School for Boys continued to have as many pupils as it could take, from the local area and in some cases from far beyond, until a later group of owners closed it in 1885 in order to open a school for girls on the property.

Located north of Brooklyn Street and east of Acland Street, the Kenyon Military Academy occupied a sixty-acre campus that included Milnor Hall, Delano Hall, and a large drill hall, as well as a large parade ground and extensive playing fields. The academy, established in the 1870s, had its roots in the Kenyon Grammar School, a successful institution from its founding in 1824 until enrollment problems brought about by the dislocations of the Civil War precipitated its demise in the 1870s. Although it quickly became a prestigious institution, the Kenyon Military Academy suffered a catastrophic fire on February 24, 1906, in which three students died and another ten were seriously injured, and it closed in 1907 after a year of operating in makeshift accommodations.

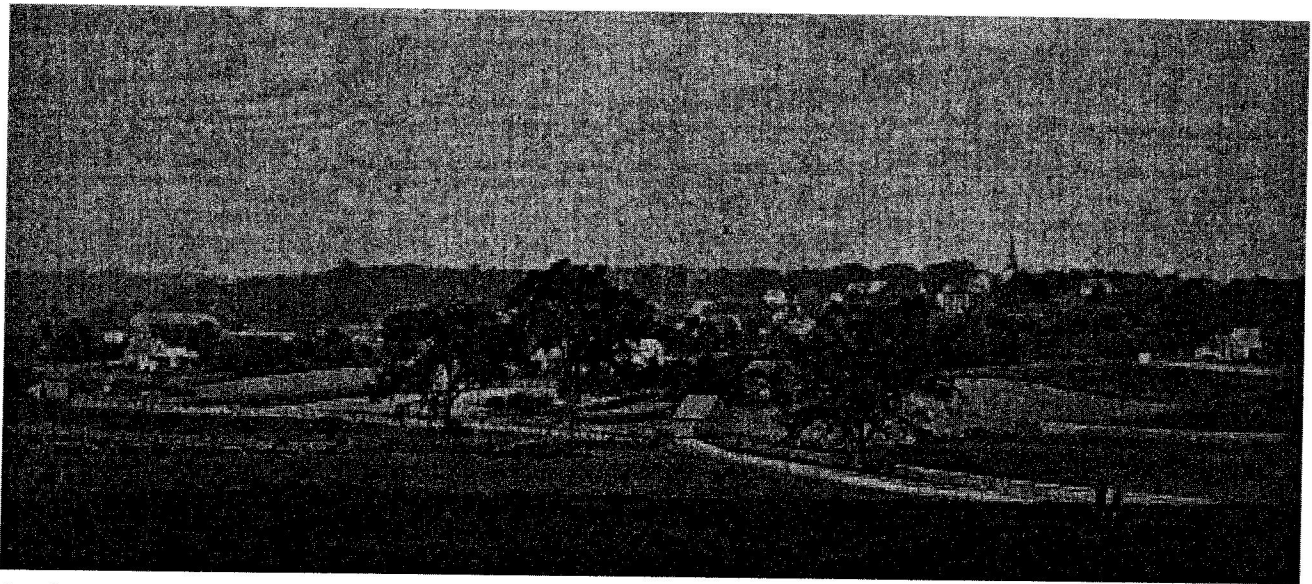


Harcourt Place School for Girls

The Harcourt Place School for Girls, or Harcourt Place Seminary, opened in 1887 on the former site of the Harcourt Place School for Boys. A college-preparatory secondary school, it served boarding students from across the country as well as day students from the village and surrounding areas. The Harcourt Place School for Girls gained fame for its program, which allowed many of its graduates to enter top women's colleges with advanced standing, but it was forced to close in 1936, a victim of the Great Depression. Its commodious buildings, which stood on the site now occupied by the

College's Norton Hall, were demolished in 1937, with the exception of the old McIlvaine house of the 1830s, which survived into the early 1950s. Before Norton was constructed, the Harcourt Place acreage was the home of the post World War II army-surplus housing for students that came to be known as Splinterville.

Gambier's first public school, founded sometime before 1835, was housed in a one-room building located on the south side of Wiggin Street east of the Methodist church, on a site that would later be occupied by the famous – or, if you were a teetotaler, infamous – Dorothy's Lunch. That school was succeeded by one in a two-room structure near the current home of the Wilson Apartments on Scott Lane. The third school was a large four-room building on the site of today's



Gambier's third school building can be seen just below and to the left of the steeple of the Church of the Holy Spirit in this photo, taken from east of the village in the 1890s.

Wiggin Street School Elementary School. In the first recorded instance of a service of its sort in the state of Ohio, pupils who lived beyond walking distance to the school were picked up at and delivered to their homes in a tally-ho, an enclosed carriage pulled by two horses.

The older portion of the structure we know as Wiggin Street School was dedicated in 1905, with the previous building at that location being moved to the back of the lot, along Brooklyn Street. At the time the then-modern Gambier Public School opened, it held six classrooms, which served both elementary and secondary students, and a scientific laboratory in the basement. Boys entered the school on the west, girls on the east, and teachers and guests through the front door on the south.



The Congregational Church can be seen in the background of this 1897 photo of Kenyon Military Academy cadets sleighing on the grounds of the Harcourt Place School for Girls.

The village's Sunday schools also thrived in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sponsored by the Episcopalians, the Methodists, and the Cumberland Presbyterians, who later reorganized as Congregationalists. The latter group built a church just north of Gambier in 1871 and then moved the structure into the village, to a site on Ward Street, in 1876. The building was razed in the early years of the twentieth century when the congregation merged with one in Mount Vernon.

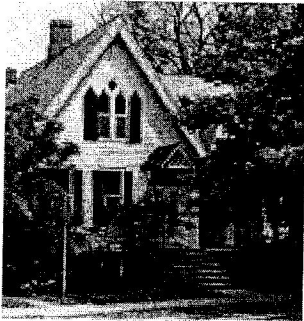
The 1881 *History of Knox County* concludes its description of Gambier with these words: "The village makes no especial claim as a business place, but as a place of residence it can hardly have a superior, especially for those who have a family to educate and prepare for the duties of life. The society is excellent; saloons and other low places of resort are not allowed on the grounds, and the purity of the moral atmosphere is unexceptionable."

Despite having "no especial claim as a business place," Gambier had developed a thriving commercial district along Chase and Gaskin avenues between Wiggin and Brooklyn streets by the turn of the twentieth century. As Louise Adams, a Gambier native, recalled in an article for the College's alumni magazine in 1967, there were three general stores, two bakeries, a bank, a barbershop, restaurants and ice-cream parlors, and of course, a post office.



Doolittle's Store of 1869 (right) in an 1987 photo. To the left is the Doolittle house, which still stands on Gaskin Avenue, and Dr. Hyatt's drugstore (1893).

place went a women's exchange – a consignment store – that was supplanted by a meat market. On the building's second floor were apartments, one of which was the source of the fire that claimed the structure in 1947. The lot was then cleared for construction of the Village Inn.

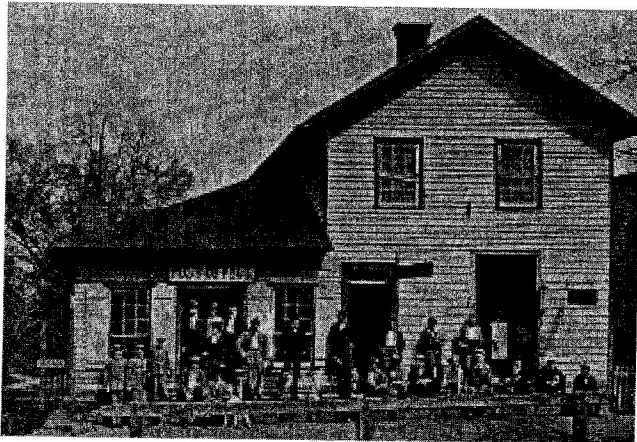


Douglass House

The brick house at the corner of Gaskin and Scott Lane, one of Gambier's older residences, was then the home of the Doolittle family. Later it was bought by the village grocer, Jim Hayes, who left it to his daughter Ellen Schaeffer, the current owner. Across Scott Lane sat an 1893 building used as a drugstore, complete with soda fountain in the rear, run by a Dr. Hyatt and then a Mr. Jackson, who sold it to Frank Vernon to house a restaurant. Next door was a handsome Gothic Revival residence, built in the 1850s as a private home and later used as a boarding house and dining room for students from the College in both the late nineteenth and early and mid twentieth centuries. It served again as a residence, for Vernon and his family, before being demolished in 1965, along with the

other buildings on Gaskin from Scott Lane to Brooklyn, to make way for Farr Hall.

North of this structure, known variously as the Bourne House, Douglass House, and Vernon House, stood a building that was home to a shoe store and repair shop run by A.L. Jacobs, who lived on the second floor. Next to it was a large edifice owned by E.S. Balcom, who let commercial spaces to a barber, a carpenter, a dressmaker, a tailor, and a Kenyon student named Thomas Hazzard who ran a photographic gallery. On the upper level was a Reading Room for the village's boys; girls were admitted one day per week to draw out books to be read at home. In later years, the Balcom Building housed a bookstore run by Denham Sutcliffe, a professor of English at the College.



The Fish Building in the 1890s

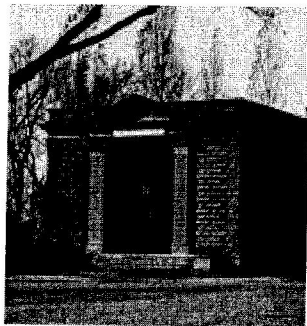
Wright's Store at the corner of Gaskin and Wiggin was still in operation in 1907. As a general store, it carried groceries, hardware, and other miscellaneous items, but it did not stock baked goods or fresh vegetables.

Next in line on Gaskin was Doolittle's 1869 building, also a general store but one that carried notions, stockings, yard goods, and men's clothing in addition to groceries and hardware. At the side of the store was a cooperative bookstore, run by Kenyon students, that later moved to space beside the post office. In its

On the corner of Gaskin and Brooklyn stood the Fish Building, which housed the post office. Adams remembered that at one point during the days in which the postmaster's position was a political appointment, two sisters – one a Democrat and the other a Republican – held the jobs of postmistress and assistant, exchanging offices as one or the other party came into power. But in 1913, when the Democrats swept into office, a Mr. Jackson became postmaster and moved the office and his drugstore down the block to the corner of Gaskin and Wiggin.

At the south end of the Fish Building was a barbershop operated by William Hunter, which was replaced by the cooperative bookstore when Hunter moved across the street. On the lower level of the Fish Building, which was entered around the corner on Brooklyn Street, was Adrian Stoyles bakery. "Children passed by this quickly," Adams recalled, "for it was rumored that he sold liquor." As you might imagine, the rumor, if such it was, helped the bakery become a favorite gathering place for Kenyon students.

On Brooklyn Street just east of this den of iniquity, stood the old Methodist church building, moved to the site in 1888 when construction began on the new edifice at the corner of Wiggin and Acland streets. The old building was subsequently used as the town hall, jail, and firehouse; then as the Red Men's Hall; and later as the high-school gymnasium. Later still, it was converted into a garage and then apartments before being torn down in the early 1960s.



Peoples Bank (ca. 1941)

Moving across the street to the corner of Chase Avenue and Brooklyn Street, the first structure a person would have encountered in 1907 was the bank building, completed late in 1905, the year in which the Gambier Banking Company – later to become the Peoples Bank – was organized. Its predecessor, the Gambier Savings Bank, had been housed in a room of a Mr. Oliver's frame house on the same site. Just west of it, facing Brooklyn was a 1906 structure housing the telephone exchange, an ice-cream parlor, and, on the second floor, apartments. That building was replaced in 1965 by the gas station most recently known as Campus Auto and Fuel.

Immediately south of the bank were Harry Stoyles bakery and home. Unlike the other Stoyles bakery, Harry's seems to have enjoyed a reputation untainted by illicit sales of alcohol. The bakery produced breads, pies, and other goods, which freshmen were often required by upperclassmen to fetch for snacks in the evening hours. Harry Stoyles also operated a restaurant on the bakery's premises, provided a hall for the Knights of Pythias on the second floor, and, when the automobile came to Gambier, installed the village's first gas pump out front.

A brief aside here on those early autos in Gambier: long-time resident Mary Flecknoe remembered that the village's first people to own cars were, perhaps not surprisingly, Dr. Blake, an elderly physician, and Henry Wright, the undertaker. The first student to have a car on campus was Fred Dechant, a member of the Class of 1916, who toiled around Gambier in a bright red Stutz Bearcat and obligingly gave rides to village children.



Post Office (ca. 1951)

In 1931, a fire destroyed Harry Stoyles's buildings, along with the next house to the south, which was owned by George Vernon, who kept a meat market in the rear, accessible from the alley. Thus cleared, the property was sold to the government, which erected the new Gambier Post Office on the site in 1940.

The three structures across the alley, those that now house Kenyon's College Relations offices, were completed in and shortly after 1885 to replace buildings destroyed in a fire that year. The first of these, now the home of Kenyon's development office, succeeded an 1833 structure built by Mardenbro White, an early agent and treasurer of the College, on the site of Kenyon's first store, a log cabin from which, according to George Franklin Smythe, "goods of all sorts were sold, most of them having been hauled over the mountains in wagons from Philadelphia." Among the items available for sale were books, chinaware and cutlery, groceries, hardware, jewelry, medicines, stationery, and a wide variety of clothing and fabrics by the yard, which, Smythe notes, "suggest that even in that primitive age



Left: William Hunter's barbershop. Right: From left to right, the houses that were Dr. Welker's and Mrs. Cunningham's homes and the successor to the Mardenbro White Building on Chase Avenue.



the young men of the college and the young ladies of the vicinage were not unmindful of their appearance."

First used as a general store, White's building went on to house book and drug stores operated by William French. Following its reconstruction after the fire, its first floor was occupied by Fred Smith's store and then by William Hunter's barbershop (which, much to the dismay of some, contained billiard and pool tables at the rear), while the second floor was rented to the Maccabees Lodge. In 1912, the College

began its common dining experiment in this building, after which it was used as a post office, bookstore, and classrooms for several departments before taking on its current role in the 1970s.

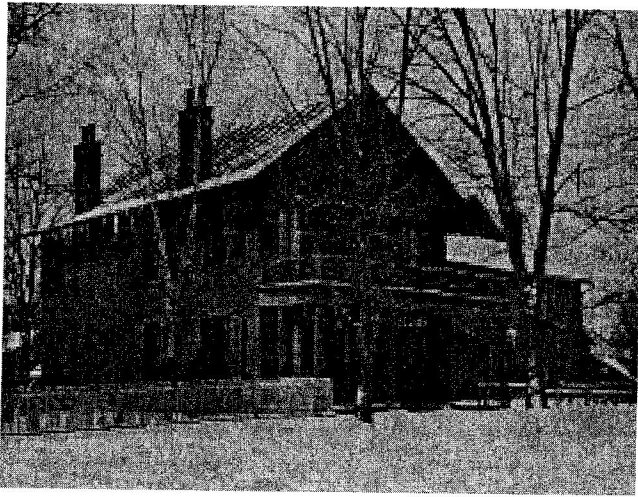
Next door, in the building now occupied by Kenyon's Office of Alumni and Parent Programs, was the home of a Mrs. Cunningham. Its neighbor to the south, which now houses the College's public affairs office, was the home and office of Dr. Welker, described by Kenyon's early twentieth-century president William Foster Peirce as "a most excellent village physician" but remembered in the same years by Mary Flecknoe as "being long past the age of practicing medicine, although he still did."

The last building facing Chase was Scott's, another general store, which had been started by A.G. Scott in 1838 on a site on the south side of Wiggin Street within the area that became the College Park. In 1881, Scott bought the property at the corner of Chase and Wiggin and built a new store, which also contained a cobbler's shop. A prominent community member who was also one of the village's chief landowners, Scott gained some measure of fame in the world beyond Gambier as the guardian of two local dwarfs, the brothers Barney and Hiram Davis, who were exhibited by P.T. Barnum as the "Wild Men of Borneo." (By the way, the Davises, who were renamed Plutano and Waino by Barnum, are buried in a Mount Vernon, Ohio, cemetery under a stone inscribed "Little Men.")



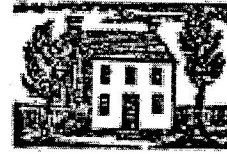
Johnny Waugh House

Behind Scott's, in the spot now occupied by the Kenyon Inn, stood the Johnny Waugh house, so called for the name of the tailor who lived and maintained his shop there for many years. The structure, which had been built to serve as a temporary dormitory in Chase's time, was moved to Ward Street to make way for the Alumni House, completed in 1937 and torn down in 1984 to make way for the Kenyon Inn. The Waugh house is now the residence of Pamela Hollie and Fred Kluge.



The Kenyon House, with the 1855 addition at left and the older portions, including the one-time temporary dormitory, at right. Also, an early advertisement for the hotel.

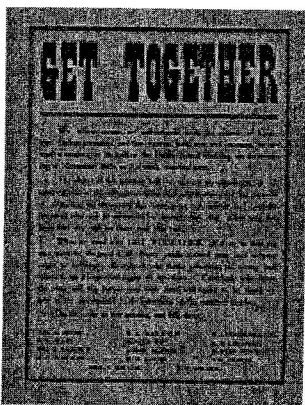
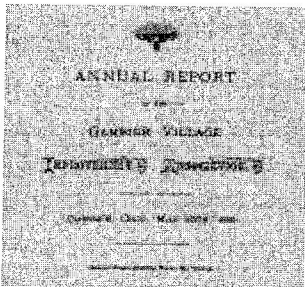
COLLEGE HOTEL.



Ralph Keeler, Esq.

Of the College Hotel, respectfully solicits the patronage of the Gambier public, and takes great pleasure in stating that his clerk, Mr. Bob Wright, and Katy, his sylph-like cook, will assist him in rendering things agreeable.

Across the street from Scott's, on the south side of Wiggin Street, stood not only Scott's former store but also a few other commercial buildings and the "Kenyon House" or "Old Hotel," which had begun its life as Chase's "house for strangers." To that early log structure had been attached first another of the houses that originally served as a temporary dormitory, which was moved from across the street, where it had most recently served as "Captain Brown's Billiard Parlor and Oyster House." In 1855, a brick building was added, at the front, that was the handiwork of its owner at the time, Robert Wright. After falling into both ill repair and ill repute, the hotel was repurchased by the College in 1876 and leased to a trustworthy innkeeper. By the turn of the twentieth century, all of these structures along the south side of Wiggin had become unsightly, and by 1917, all had been demolished.



Above: The 1895 annual report of the Gambier Village Improvement Association and a 1905 call to action

Efforts to beautify the village center did not end with President Douglass and Bishop Bedell. In 1884, the Gambier Village Improvement Association was formed to replace dead or dying trees and turf and to encourage the systematic planting of trees along all Gambier streets. The group's annual report for 1885, which reported that 130 new trees had been set out that spring, noted, "Nature has done much for us, and will do more, if we work together with her." Twenty years later, in 1905, another group took on a similar task, along with several additional charges associated with village operations. Such efforts have occurred sporadically since that time, as in the annual Middle Path Days of the 1970s and 80s, which brought together town and gown for a variety of clean-up and beautification efforts throughout Gambier.

The village continued to attract new businesses and a colorful array of proprietors as the twentieth century proceeded. Among those with the longest tenure was Jim Hayes, the "Grocer of Gambier," who began working in Gambier in 1937 and stayed on as a community mainstay for several decades, operating first a grocery in the old building at the corner of Gaskin Avenue and Wiggin Street that now houses the Middle Ground Café, and then the Village Market in Farr Hall from the day it opened in 1966 until his retirement in 1974. Hayes, who died in 1997 at the age of eighty-seven, also built the Village Inn, which opened in 1947 and also contained apartments and shops, and served as a president of the Peoples Bank of Gambier.



Above: Jim Hayes's first store was located for many years in one of Gambier's oldest buildings, now home to Middle Ground Cafe. Right: Dorothy's Lunch as a popular hangout for townspeople and students alike, here being served by Lillian Bickel Tufford.



And any discussion of the village's business history must include a mention of Dorothy Gorsuch Dean Rattray, the long-time proprietor of Dorothy's Lunch. Dorothy's – which was first known as Gene's, for first husband Gene Dean, then as Dorothy Dean's after his death, and finally as Dorothy's Lunch – was a basement bar and grill at 206 East Wiggin Street that saw its heyday in the late 1940s, the 1950s, and the early 1960s. Dorothy herself, who became Mrs. Rattray when she married James Rattray, one of the stonemasons engaged to rebuild Old Kenyon after the 1949 fire, was one of the main attractions at the burger and brew spot. Described as a “warm, wonderful woman” by Fred Kluge, a habitue of the bar in his student days, Dorothy drew a diverse clientele from Gambier, the College, and the surrounding area. At some unrecorded time in the early 1970s, Dorothy's Lunch passed out of Rattray's hands and then succumbed to a tax closure. The building that housed it, by then long derelict, was burned as a training exercise by the College Township Fire Department in 1999.

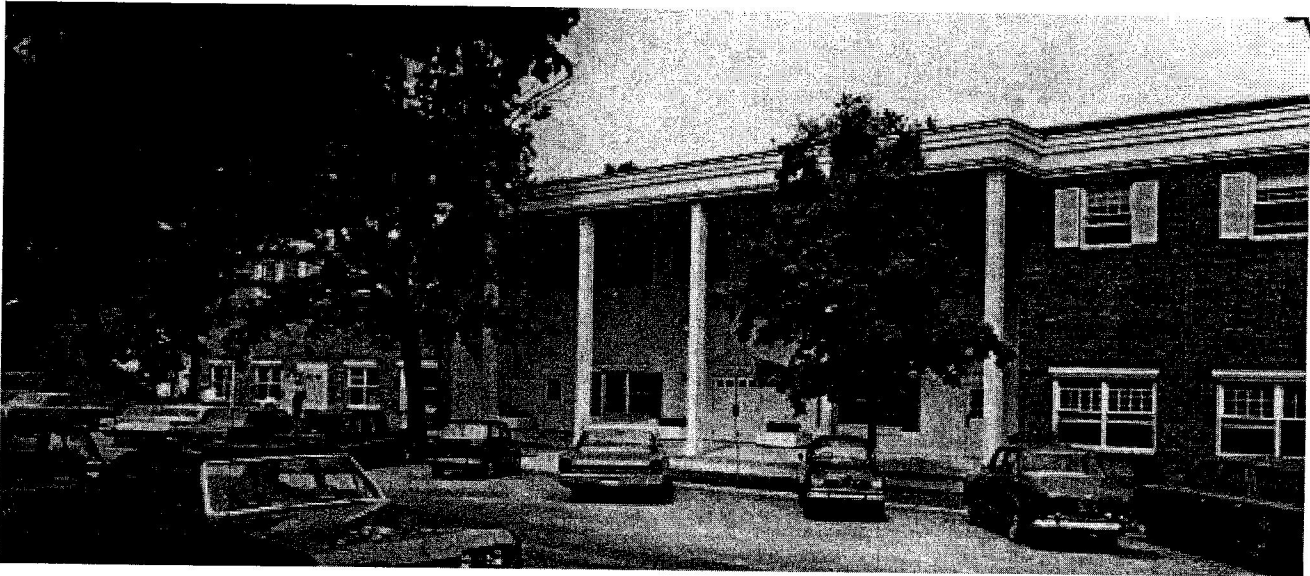


Gaskin Avenue, looking south, in 1964

Just as the advent of the mall and the superstore – within the living memories of many of us here tonight – imperiled the future of downtown shopping areas in cities both large and small, the advent of the automobile changed the nature of commercial activity several decades earlier. For Gambier, that meant a gradual dwindling of the number of businesses in the village center as more and more shoppers chose to make the drive to Mount Vernon, where the selection of goods was greater, or even to venture as far as Columbus or even Cleveland. Whether she intended it or not, Louise Adams revealed another reason why

consumers began to look farther afield when she recalled the high level of excitement that the prospect of a shopping trip could engender in an entire family.

For better or worse, the completion of Farr Hall in 1966 is a milestone in the history of downtown Gambier. Earlier in the decade, the College's trustees had begun to campaign for the village to experience a bit of the urban redevelopment that was sweeping the country by replacing



Farr Hall, shortly after its opening in 1966

the picturesque, but increasingly decrepit, structures on the block of Gaskin Avenue between Scott Lane and Brooklyn Street. Thus, the death knell was sounded for several businesses, including Vernon's Restaurant, Jacobs

Shoe Store and Repair Shop, barber and tailor shops, and Benedict's General Store.

At its dedication in 1966, Farr Hall contained the Kenyon bookstore, a pizza shop, and the new Village Market on its first floor, rooms for thirty of the College's seniors on the second floor, and a beauty shop and laundromat on the lower level. Nevertheless, many complained that the monolithic structure was out of proportion with other village buildings. A look back at the streetscape it replaced, or even a glance around downtown Gambier today, makes it clear they had a point. Many ideas have been suggested and plans submitted for retrofitting the building to make it both more user-friendly and more viewer-friendly, although none, as yet, has come to fruition.

Shortly after Farr Hall opened, the character of the village center was altered still more drastically by the construction of the commons and residence halls of Kenyon's Coordinate College for Women, which opened in the fall of 1969. Built in the area just north of downtown, the new structures, with their architecture designed to contrast with the Kenyon campus, replaced a bucolic quarter of the village that had previously held only a few historic houses and some of the remnants of Splinterville.

Over the decades, some aspects of the downtown scene have come full circle. After Chase's departure in 1831, the College began to loosen its grip on the village center by selling properties to business owners. Throughout at least half of the nineteenth century, and up through 1940s, most lots in the downtown area were privately owned. That began to change as Kenyon reacquired properties, for a variety of reasons, beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the 60s and 70s. Its most recent acquisition, in 2006, was the Village Inn, which has sat idle for a number of years. A new restaurant is to open there this spring.

In recent years, Gambier's commercial district has suffered from a variety of ills, most of which are common to other small towns in the twenty-first century. These range from competition from more urban retailers and suburban superstores, to the high costs of maintaining up-to-date inventories, to difficulty in finding an adequate supply of workers, among many other problems. But there are also small-town success stories out there from which we can learn. With their history of cooperation, Kenyon and Gambier are in a position to work together, as many of those who preceded us here did, to bring renewed vitality, a diverse and sustainable commercial area, and perhaps an additional measure of beauty to the village's center in the months and years ahead.