

# First Impressions

*of*

## Cassville, Wisconsin

*Spring Green Visit 11/20/91*

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*A program for community improvement*

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*Conducted by:*

*Sauk County Development Corporation  
&  
Spring Green Area Chamber of Commerce*

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*Developed by:*

*Grant County Economic Development Corporation  
&  
Grant County UW-Extension Resource Agent*

## SUMMARY REPORT

Our group visited Cassville on a beautiful late fall day. The sun was shining throughout, and temperatures were in the low 50's. We arrived in the community at approximately 10:00 a.m., and departed a little after 2:00 p.m.

Our group consisted of four individuals; three men and one woman. One is the editor of a newspaper, one a photographer/reporter, one public utility employee, and one a developer. All are between the ages of 30 and 50.

Upon entering the village, we checked out all possible entrances except for Iowa (ferry closed). We then went up to the top of the state park for a look around. We drove through Stonefield Village. Next we did an auto tour of the entire community. Later, we parked downtown and split up. After one hour of concentrating on the downtown, we met for lunch. Finally, we conducted a walking tour-of the residential areas, stopped off at the library, and looked for the proposed industrial site.

Cassville impressed us with its schools, scenic beauty, and historic residential area. Even the new homes were nice. We were disappointed with the complete lack of a retail sector in the downtown. It is also unfortunate that the community does not have an industrial park or site that it already , owns to offer to prospects. The contact with the E.D. representative was informative and enjoyable, but pointless without an actual site. Vague promises about potential sites do not cut it in today's industrial real estate market.

Overall, we would recommend continued thrusts towards the tourist industry, a new and concentrated thrust towards retail development, and the purchase of at least one 10 acre site for industrial development. Keep up the excellent work with the parks, schools, and residential areas.

If you have any questions about the enclosed report, please contact David J. Piggott at (608) 356-3133.

Respectfully,

David J. Piggott  
Executive Director  
Sauk County Development Corp.

**1. What *was my perception before visiting the community:* What *did I expect, etc***

I expected a small town with somewhat limited retail business. I expected old buildings and not much new industry or new homes.

Since it is between the bluffs and the river, I expected a long, narrow town.

Knew it was a river town and expected more of a tourist type atmosphere. Had heard about Stonefield Village.

My pre-visit expectations ran along the line of marinas and bait shops because of the community's location on the Mississippi.

**2 *Approaching the community, what do you notice first? (Evaluate EACH entrance)***

There was a nice welcome sign put up by the FFA outside of town on the Hwy 81 entrance, although the lettering seems to be fading. The green on white Stonefield Village Ahead signs at 30, 15 and 10 Mile intervals let us know we were getting closer, but the rust was beginning to show on some of them.

Highway 81 was scenic which is a plus from the tourism angle, but it was not a pleasant experience to meet an on-coming semi on the narrow curved section. An untidy yard of a house on the left side of the road near the village boundary was a negative eye-catcher.

Hwy 133 entrances were wider, but I don't recall seeing any welcome signs.

The narrow approach. Cliffs & bluffs on one or both sides. No room for road expansion.

Positive: Scenic area with cliffs and valleys -133N; Power plant was neat and orderly; The Nelson Dewey Park is an asset.

Negative: Roads were windy and narrow; No welcome sign on 133.

Not marked very well. Only one welcome sign. Entrances seemed as though they would be very pretty in summer and fall.

81 - **An** adventure. Saw one sign a ways out of town.

133N - very scenic entrance.

133S - Saw homes and businesses first.

Considering that this is a tourist attraction, I was surprised by the lack of promotional and welcome signs.

**3. *As you drive around town your comments on'***

**Appearance**

**1. *Downtown***

Not very attractive. Unfortunately, this is the first area that you see when driving into the village. Was shocked at how little retail is in the village.

The village has a **very** limited retail base. Was told that you have to travel to find clothing, hardware, liquor, & business services. Too much residential activity on the main drag.

The store fronts needed repair. Some were closed up and unused. The street was clean. People on the street spoke when spoken to by us.

Vacant storefronts, rusted signs and the poor condition of the sidewalks gave a general appearance of decay. There were some exceptions, the grocery and the floral shop stood out. The style of the street lights was out of sync with the older buildings.

## *2. Residential*

Fantastic. Wide streets, well maintained older homes. Some real beauties along the river. The only problem was a few mobile homes interspersed among permanent homes.

The older well-kept homes on the wide streets were very nice. Some of the newer homes were also very good. The intersperses mobile homes indicated a lack of planning or zoning.

The residential area was very pleasant as I walked around. The streets were very wide and the homes were very attractive. I especially liked the homes next to the river and the red brick homes that were old, but very well kept up.

The homes were all fairly kept up. No real dumpy places. The trailers sprinkled in with the homes was unusual. Residential streets except for the main drag were quite wide with curb and gutter evident. Quite impressed with the appearance of most of the homes.

## *3. Industrial park*

Nearly non-existent. Hard to find and very unappealing.

I didn't see one. Possibilities are limited by the bluffs and the river, and the out of the way location.

There isn't any. We did go look at the 40-50 acre parcel on the south side of town. We did locate SC Data and the speaker company.

We couldn't find it. If we did find it, it was not what we expected.

## *4. Parks*

There seemed to be adequate playgrounds, and athletic fields and courts. Some nice equipment for the younger children.

Very impressed with the facilities at Nelson-Dewey park. I would like to visit it again in the summer. The local park along the river was also a very adequate facility.

The park by the river seemed very nice with many things for a family to do. I also noticed many tennis courts in the village, perhaps more than I expected for a town this size.

I was impressed with the State Park, the Park along the river, the pool, the tennis courts, and the athletic facilities. Very nice.

### *5. Schools*

Tops! New elementary school (energy efficient). **Very** nice high school. Even the Catholic school was in good shape. I'd sent my kids to any one of the schools.

I liked the way the schools were situated. The buildings seemed good. To have a new elementary school in a town this size is impressive,

The schools were all located in the same area, which is very nice. They were newer facilities and were very attractive.

This, by appearances was a real strength for the community. The new grade school, and the Catholic school both had a nice appearance from the outside. The 30 year old high school seems to be holding up well.

### *6. Infrastructure (Sidewalks, streets, lighting, etc.)*

Sidewalks downtown were very poor and need work.

Sidewalks.

Nice wide roads, rough sidewalks.

For an old town, the fixtures were fairly new and the sidewalks could use a little work. Sidewalks off the main drag were good.

### *7. Other*

Breathtaking view from the State Park. Stonefield village was nice. Power plants were well kept, and not a detriment.

The scenic and historic attractions at Stonefield Village and Dewey Park are a wonderful nearby asset to the community.

We were never spoken to first by any retailers. One florist shop totally ignored us the whole time we were in there (probably a total of **5** to **7** minutes). No acknowledgement when we walked out either.

## **B. Signing**

### *1. Community entrance/exit signs*

Only saw the one sign on Hwy 81.

Signs were small and not very visible on one end of town. Couldn't find any signs at all on the other end of town.

Not enough of them, especially for a tourist area.

## 2. *Streets*

Poor.

Seemed to be very old and in need of replacement.

Signs need paint, faded and rusting.

## 3. *Directions to Hospital/Parks/etc.*

Stonefield and Dewey directions clear.

I had no problem finding my way around.

No hospital. Didn't really notice signs to the park.

I got directions and help from those I approached, but I had to take the first step.

## 4. *Storefront signs*

Very rough shape. I mean really, really rough shape.

Again, very poor. Didn't see any originality.

Generally not the greatest, but perhaps the best that could be done with limited capital.

Downtown could really use a facelift. The empty buildings **look** a bit shabby. More could be done to make the existing places more pleasant looking.

## 5. *Industrial Park*

Nonexistent.

Couldn't find one.

No sign noticed.

No park, hence, no sign.

## 6. *City Hall, police, etc.*

Very easy to find. Beautiful building.

Municipal building clearly marked. Hand painted sign on water department could be replaced with something more attractive or painted over.

The municipal building was beautiful and those inside most helpful and friendly.

This was well marked.

#### *7. Billboards/advertising, etc.*

Most appeared to be home made signs and not many were professionally done. They weren't very big either.

Not very many, and too many were hand painted.

Hardly noticed any at all.

Don't recall seeing many.

#### **4. Visitor/community information**

##### **A. City/Village Hall**

###### *1. Is there a street map?*

Yes. I was given one at the Village Clerk's office.

A walking map was available.

None available.

Saw a large street map and aerial photo on the wall in the village board room. A hand out street map was available.

###### *2. Community brochure/directory*

There was a rack of brochures in the Village Hall. Not an "industrial development" brochure though.

There was a list of events for the high school.

Found brochures at the grocery store and at the library.

A walking tour brochure had a nice map and good information on historic buildings.

###### *3. Community profile (including business and industrial opportunities)*

None available.

Did not see anything which profiled the retail or industrial businesses.

There is no realtor in town, so properties must be searched out by individuals. The potential for industrial growth seems unlikely based upon the lack of an industrial park and the availability of people to work for industry.

None in evidence.

*4. Recommendations on place to stay/eat/visit...etc.*

The motel looked clean and accessible from either direction. The two B&B houses looked very neat and were close to downtown.

Considering that people told me that the place was packed with tourists during the summer, I was left wondering where they ate and slept.

B&B brochure, Stonefield and Dewey brochures.

Not a lot of choices to eat and saw only one motel. I had to ask someone where a "good" place to eat could be found.

*5. Contact people & address listed if I want more info.*

**N.A.**

Vince Tranchita, whom I spoke with.

*6. Complimentary items (Postcards, bookmarks, coupons, etc.)*

None offered.

The stores did have brochures on events nearby and within Cassville. That was evident every place we stopped at.

Brochures

**A** lot ~~of~~ brochures on the area could be found at most places that I stopped.

**B. Chamber office/visitor info center**

*1. Easy to locate (and did people refer you to it?)*

There isn't one.

**N.A.**

The only place where I could get much information was at the library where the ladies I talked to were very friendly and helpful.

**N.A.**

*2. Comments on info available (Street map/brochures/community profile/etc.)*

**N.A.**

N.A.

Map and brochure rack at village hall was helpful.

The brochures for things to do, etc... were displayed attractively and had easy access in all places of business that I noticed.

*3. Recommendations on places to stay/eat/visit etc.*

Shopkeepers were easy to talk to after you made the first approach. I think it should be the other 'wayaround.

N.A.

The folks at village hall were friendly.

N.A.

*4. How prepared/helpful were they.*

N.A.

Village hall folks were very prepared and informed.

Friendly after you got them warmed up.

N.A.

*5. Convenient hours?*

N.A.

The village should have a designated information center.

Village hall hours,

No. Several places of business which I would have thought would be open on a Wednesday had closed signs on their doors.

**C. Info from general community (service station/motel/bars/restaurants/shop employees, etc.)**

*1. How knowledgeable about the community were they?*

People in Village Clerks Office knew what was going on and immediately referred me to the industrial development contact. They even called him without me asking so I couldn't escape their clutches. Good quick response to a prospect. Other people in town were also nice. Women bartender at the Eagle's Nest was friendly and provided me with answers to all my questions, Staff at Robin's Nest was friendly. Old-timers on the sidewalks all said hello.

Person in large antique shop was knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Librarians were

knowledgeable and helpful. Clerk at Kard Korner was very nice.

Was unable to speak with very many local people, but most seemed very nice and informed.

They knew what resources were available (e.d. contact) and which were not (pharmacy and real estate help).

*2. Did they refer you to someone else **who** could help?*

They sent me to Vince.

N.A.

N.A.

Yes, when asking for chamber info we were referred elsewhere. When asking about info on the industrial park we were referred elsewhere.

*3. Attitude, appearance, etc.*

Good. Laid back.

The people had good attitudes and a nice appearance.

Attitude was friendly if we approached them first. The retail stores we went into never acknowledged us until we approached the merchant to ask a question or to make inquiries. General appearance of the town was clean, retail stores were all clean and orderly even though the exteriors were often very old.

The village seems to be comprised mainly of older people. Very few young people.

*4. Other comments*

Vince did a great job of providing me with the information I needed without being too pushy. He seemed honest and answered all of my questions quickly. He didn't try to skirt the issues when I asked pointed questions about the village. He is a good representative.

The clerk at the flower shop did not greet or welcome our group because she was conversing with a friend about personal matters. We were in the store for five minutes without being acknowledged so we left.

There was a business called "It's You" on the main street that had curtains concealing what type of enterprise it was. When one of our group tried to look through the glass, he was yelled at by the man inside.

Drunk guy told me that he was "drunk last night, drunk this morning, and might not go into work tomorrow either." When I suggested it might be in his interest to return to work the next day, he replied, "Aw, \*\*\*\*'em."

Since industry is not a large income provider, I think they should promote tourism.

## **5. General**

### **A. Do residents know their community history/events/directions/etc.**

I thought that the people I spoke with were well informed. We had lunch at the table next to the Cancer Society group. Nice to see volunteers.

Generally speaking, yes.

Did not speak with too many local people.

Judging from the walking tour brochure, the active historical society with its volunteers doing tours at Dewey, there is quite a bit of interest in local history. The people I spoke to knew their way around.

### **B. Services...variety of retail ...lodging facilities...**

The retail sector barely exists. No hardware store, no pharmacy. You name it, when it come to retail Cassville does not have it. People apparently drive to Prairie du Chien or Dubuque when they need things. It was good to see a medical clinic in town.

Retail is hurtin' for certain. People told us that they have to drive to Lancaster when ever they want to buy something.

Retail facilities greatly lacking - realtor, pharmacy, clothing, gifts, hardware. **As** far as lodging, the motel and the 2 B&B's all looked inviting.

This is the weakest point of the village. Retail shops are nearly non-existent and I only saw one motel.

### **C. Are there public restrooms.**

There were some at village hall. I also noticed some near the water front park.

Public restrooms are in the municipal building.

Only restrooms I found were in the municipal building.

Didn't see any.

### **D. Payphones...are they working, phone books intact.**

Only saw one payphone, with no book.

I needed directions to find the one payphone. When I found it there was no book.

One pay phone - no book.

After considerable searching, one of our group found a pay phone on a side street, without a directory.

**E. Industrial park...does it look active & attractive.**

Unidentifiable.

There isn't one.

The proposed site was very hard to find. Would be unappealing to someone considering a location there.

Couldn't find it.

**F. What does the community TASTE like? (specialty restaurants/bakeries/etc.)**

The Robin's Nest provided typical cafe fare. All other lunch options were in bars. Where do you go for romantic dinners or business/dinner meetings?

The one restaurant was average.

Small cafe was friendly, very clean, food tasty and hot.

Not much of a selection for restaurants. Could really use at least one fine restaurant where steaks and seafood are available.

**G. What does the community SMELL like?**

Very rural and very pretty.

No air pollution from factories or power plants. No stink from the river or debris along the shore.

Main street had the distinctive odor of fabric softener and detergent. It seemed to be coming from the laundromat.

It smelled like a river town. I grew up on a Great Lake and love the smell of water.

**H. What SOUNDS do you hear?**

Pretty quiet.

Trains passing through.

Town VERY quiet.

There wasn't much noise. It was generally quiet except when the trains came through.

**I. What did community FEEL like? (Emotional response i.e. cold/warm, crowded/deserted, inviting, etc.)**

People at some retail locations were very uncaring, Went into some places and weren't even greeted, or were greeted halfheartedly.

I realize that this is the "off-season," but the residents seemed ready to settle in for winter hibernation. Let's liven up a bit.

Mixed, pleasant residential area, depressing downtown.

The few people on the streets looked at us with curiosity, as if to say "who are you and what are you doing here." Not at all aggressive or harsh, just curious.

### **DESCRIBE THE PEOPLE YOU MET (Friendly, helpful, etc.)**

Most were friendly, some indifferent, one hostile.

A few totally ignored us. Others were very helpful, providing information on where to go, what to do, etc...

Aside from a cold response from some of the business people, most of the townspeople seemed very nice. The people at the library and the municipal building were exceptionally helpful.

Seemed pretty nice to me.

### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/OBSERVATIONS:**

Most of the negatives can probably be traced to a general lack of vitality in the local economy. The town needs more money. Perhaps someone with a vision for revitalization will emerge and seek grants, additional retailers, etc... The city leaders could try to get some cooperation from property owners whose holdings need attention.

For the size of the town, I think the retail street could be made more attractive, especially since they are trying to attract tourists. The service and retail trades could be expanded.

Must expand retail sector. Might want to firm up some kind of deal on an industrial park, or at least one industrial site.

It was unfortunate that the first thing I saw when I reached town was the downtown, which shocked me. There is a real lack of a retail stores, and the ones I saw were often unattractive. The setting for the town is very pretty, the homes and the schools are very nice, but I think that the village should increase into retail trade. I couldn't believe that the town didn't have a pharmacy, and that locals had to go to Lancaster, Prairie du Chien or Dubuque to shop. If retail stores (shoes, hardware, etc...) can not make a go of it, perhaps the village should concentrate on Stonefield Village and the tourist trade. Gift shops and antique shops would tie in nicely. I would suggest that a visit to Galena may be very helpful.

**WHAT WILL YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THIS COMMUNITY  
SIX MONTHS FROM NOW**

The view from the State Park.

Stonefield Village and the lack of a downtown retail base.

Stonefield, the state park and a ride over the ferry.

The view from Dewey Park was most impressive, and Stonefield village made me want to come back.

***6. Doing it Right!***

**A. List the 5 MOST positive things you observed about the community.**

- 1.) The very scenic setting.  
The view from the Park.  
The scenic setting.  
Clean appearance of the homes and yards.
- 2.) The state park and the historical site.  
The very new schools.  
New schools.  
Proximity of the schools.
- 3.) The wide streets in the residential area.  
Playgrounds, tennis courts, parks, etc...  
The municipal building/library.  
The residential area/older brick homes.
- 4.) Municipal building.  
The historic residences.  
The river.  
Clean appearances of interiors of retail businesses.
- 5.) The schools.  
The parks and tennis courts.  
The neatness of the power plants  
The tourist opportunities the river provides.

**B. Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your own business/community and describe the steps you will take to implement it within the NEXT 72 HOURS!**

I will suggest to our village president that we have large scale maps and aerial photos on the walls of our village hall.

We might try to have more of our retail establishments stock brochures. Our town has these in some, but not in all.

**N.A.**

I liked the brochure which provided information on old homes and buildings in the area. Even people's residences often provide for interesting viewing and reading.