

IN THE pre-war years, the merchant on the Campus Corner probably knew as much about the whys and wherefores of the Sooner student as any man alive. But those years were also pre-enrolment boom, pre-automobile, pre-dormitories, pre-campus expansion, pre-financial prosperity. Today the Corner merchant, even such veterans as Joe Chatman, '27bus, has more of a fringe view of the student, still a part of campus life and yet more removed.

The students not only shopped on the Corner in 1927, when Chatman was opening his Varsity Book Store, they also lived there—in the numerous fraternity, sorority and boarding houses which were clustered around the business houses. The businessman felt closer to the students then, both in proximity and in spirit.

Chatman didn't need to be told when the Ruf Neks had held their initiation. The next morning the street in front of his store would be littered with broken barrel staves. The engineers made use of the Corner, too, for the public shaving of their beards at the climax of Engineers Week. One of Chatman's more vivid memories is of the tobacco spitting contests—both for distance and accuracy—which were staged on the corner of Boyd and Asp.

The Corner merchant also found himself involved in the students' social life, since the only place the fellows had to walk their dates was to the Corner, in the afternoon as well as evening. "If a girl was very popular," Chatman recalls, "she might have three or four dates in one afternoon. We called it 'beaning'—and they dressed up for their dates, too."

The day of the big dances is not what it once was, either. The "tag" dances, vogue when O.U. was young, have disappeared. "A fellow could dance with 25 or 30 gals in an evening," Chatman remembers. "You get to know a lot of people that way. Now they dance with the same person all evening. It's no wonder they don't enjoy dances as much as they used to."

THEN, as the University grew up, as the campus and the enrolment expanded, the Corner inevitably was pushed from the center to the edge of student life. If merchants don't know their customers as they once did, Chatman lays the blame to the problem of numbers.

"I used to know hundreds of students by name," he explains. "We didn't have ID cards then—or even drivers licenses, since the students couldn't have cars. We took their checks on how they looked—and we didn't get any more hot ones then than we do now."

The automobile has made a big change in the students' shopping habits. The campus merchants are facing the same problem plaguing businessmen everywhere—inadequate parking for their customers—in this case the growing number of auto-owning students. "Of course, they live so far from the Corner now," Chatman reasons, "that if they didn't have cars we probably would never see them at all."

The much-discussed student automobile has played an even larger role in changing the sociological phase of campus life than it has in business. The automobile has no part in Chatman's memories of his own college days or of most of his business years.

"If we could sneak off in a borrowed car for a show in the City," he says, "that was a big treat. But there weren't so many places to go then, either. If we had had the cars and the money and the places to go that students have today, we would have done the same thing they are doing."



Joe Chatman

*... as a merchant
sees him*

But even if student habits are different, Chatman will deny that the student himself has changed. He maintains that the student's attitude is much the same as that of his predecessors, that he is no more serious, no more worried than students have ever been. Chatman will argue with people who make the mistake of generalizing, who attempt to classify the individual student. "There is a tendency to blame the present generation for change, when it's the situation that changes and not the young people," he contends.

CHATMAN has come to view student life as a cycle with changes going only so far before they start turning back. He'll cite the rise of conservatism on the campus as proof of this belief, and he takes the interest in new ideas, such as the Peace Corps, as a sign that "these kids are all right."

"There has simply been a big economic change," Chatman says. "There aren't as many students who need to work. When I was in school, a fellow was lucky to have any kind of job. 'Hashing' in a fraternity house was a good job and so was working behind a soda fountain. You don't find college students behind soda fountains today.

"But the students can't be blamed for that. They are just as ambitious and probably a lot smarter than they were when I was in school—at least I hope they are smarter. They have more and bigger problems to deal with—and I don't envy them the task ahead."