

## I. Historic and Architectural Significance of the East Cambridge Neighborhood (07142021)

East Cambridge in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was a landscape of upland and salt marsh, surrounded by vast mud flats at low tide, almost entirely isolated from the rest of Cambridge and Boston. The dividing lines changed over the decades as the tides swept in and out, eroding some areas and building up others. Much of the area was rich in oysters and likely provided foraging ground for Native Americans.

The East Cambridge area was known in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as Graves' Neck for its owner and first settler, engineer Thomas Graves. One of a swarm of drumlins between the Charles and Mystic Rivers, East Cambridge formed the northernmost of a series of hills that rose out of the salt marshes north of the



Cambridge and Boston in 1640

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Charles River. East Cambridge was effectively separated from the rest of Cambridge by the expansive salt marsh to the south and west known as "the Great Marsh". East Cambridge was further isolated by Oyster Bank Bay and Gibbons' Creek, large bodies of water to the east and north respectively, which distanced the area from Boston and Charlestown.

By the late 19th century all the marshes had been filled in. East Cambridge became contiguous with Cambridgeport, but the extent of the former watery landscape is still evident in the street pattern today. South of Charles Street and west of Sixth Street the street grid is more open than in the original upland area. Blocks vary in size, the landscape is flatter, and there is more open space. This irregular area marks the extent of the original "Great Marsh".

The northern edge of East Cambridge was also transformed in the 19th century. Beginning in the 1830s, the Miller's River was gradually filled to create solid land, thus eliminating the water transportation that had been so important in attracting industry to this side of East Cambridge. The last

remnants of the original marsh landscape and tide flats which had characterized the area for so long were obliterated in the 1890s when the eastern edge of East Cambridge was filled to create a seawall on the Charles River Basin.

#### A. Early Land Use and Ownership

Thomas Graves sold his grant in 1634 to Atherton Haugh, whose descendants farmed Graves Neck for four generations before selling to a Boston merchant in 1699. Seven years later future Lieutenant Governor Spencer Phips bought the Haugh property, and by the time of his death in 1757 he had accumulated 326 acres that extended inland to Columbia Street and south to Main Street. This property, which was operated as two separate farms, was divided up and passed to Phips's children and grandchildren.

Although Phips was descended from early Puritan stock, he had long since converted to Anglicism and married his children into the Loyalist West Indian planter families who dominated society in pre-Revolutionary Boston. His daughter Mary's husband, Richard Lechmere, came into possession of the most important piece of Graves Neck and bought out most of the other heirs. The Lechmeres lived on Brattle Street near their Tory relatives and rented out the farm. They moved to Boston in 1771, and when they fled to England Lechmere Point was confiscated by the Committee of Correspondence.

During the Siege of Boston in 1775-76 the American Army fortified East Cambridge with gun batteries and earthworks. A British military map also depicts the dikes that farmers had constructed to help drain the Great Meadow.



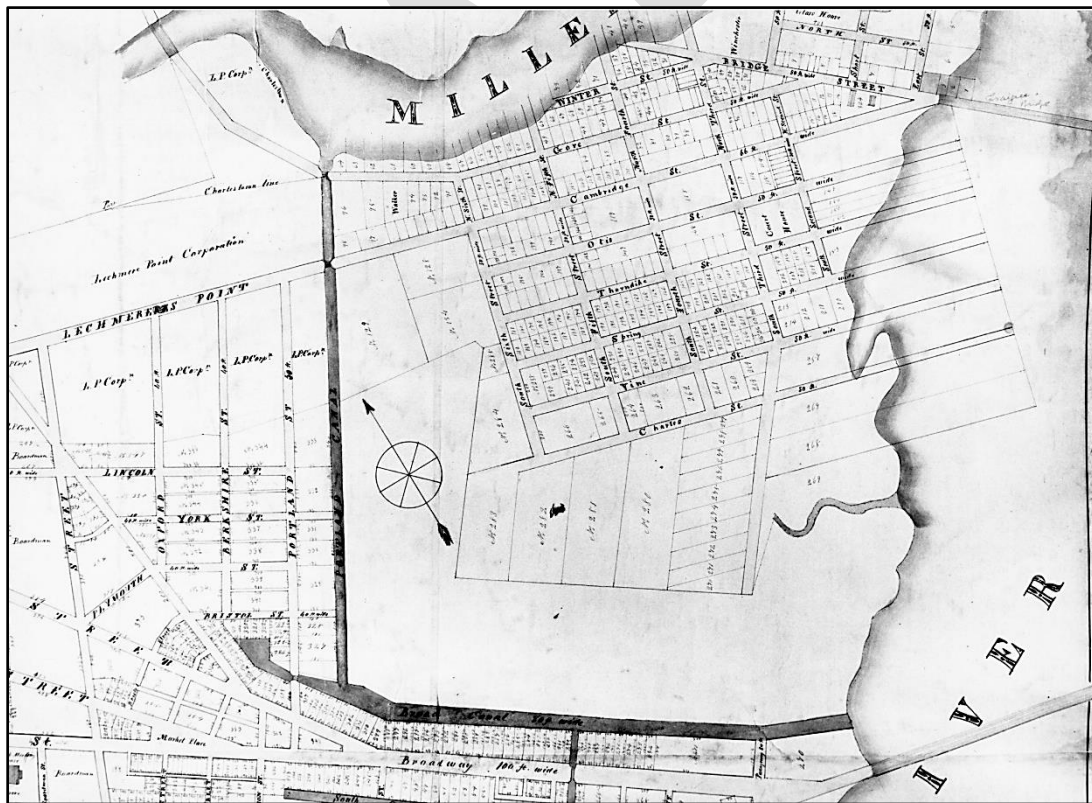
East Cambridge and Boston in 1777

Henry Pelham, *A Plan of Boston in New England ...*, London, 1777

## B. Andrew Craigie and the Lechmere Point Corporation

The prime figure in the development of East Cambridge in the 19th century was Andrew Craigie (1754-1819), an accomplished speculator in land and securities at a time when speculation was an accepted means of accumulating capital. Born in Boston in 1754, Craigie was the fourth child of Captain Andrew Craigie, who was appointed warden of the port of Boston in 1764. On April 30, 1775, at the age of 21, Craigie was appointed by the Committee of Safety of the Province of Massachusetts to take charge of the medical stores for the military in Massachusetts. After the Battle of Bunker Hill, in which Craigie participated, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress appointed him "a medical commissary and apothecary for the Massachusetts army". During his tenure with the army, Craigie amassed a sizable fortune by speculating in government securities.

After the war Craigie purchased the John Vassall estate on Brattle street, and in 1795 began secretly acquiring land on Lechmere's Point. He continued in this vein until 1805, when he petitioned the General Court for permission to build a bridge from Lechmere's Point to Boston. With the bridge under construction, Craigie put his 300-acre holdings on the market, divided into sixty shares, forming the Lechmere Point Corporation. At first Craigie sold ten shares in November 1808 and reserved fifty for himself, with the largest purchasers being Harrison Gray Otis and merchant Israel Thorndike of Beverly, who each purchased three shares. By 1809 his old colleague Christopher Gore was also involved.



East Cambridge in 1824

Peter Tufts, Plan of Cambridgeport Parish, 1824

The Lechmere Point Corporation hired Cambridge surveyor Peter Tufts to lay out lots for sale. Tufts' plan of East Cambridge is a regular grid with the main streets running parallel to Cambridge Street and the north-south streets serving as secondary streets. A second regular grid was laid out north of Bridge Street and parallel to it. Blocks are a uniform 200 x 400 feet with no alleys or service ways dividing

them. On the eastern edges of the plan, the blocks are only 295 feet long to squeeze in an extra street (Second Street) at the edge of the marsh. The grid pattern was likely influenced by the Mount Vernon Proprietors' development of Beacon Hill, which was successfully completed prior to the laying out of East Cambridge. Later extensions of Tuft's plan of East Cambridge were laid out as the neighborhood continued to grow south and west.

By 1812 the old courthouse in Harvard Square was so small and out of repair that Middlesex County authorities were considering replacing it. Some towns seized upon this opportunity to have the county offices moved to Concord, which they argued was more centrally located and where a new courthouse and jail had recently been erected. But Craigie and the Lechmere Point Corporation envisioned the courthouse would be a catalyst for their project, and in May 1813 offered a grant of land and a gift of \$24,000 to construct a new courthouse and jail. In 1813 the county accepted the Corporation's offer and appointed a committee to oversee construction of the new buildings at Lechmere Point, instantly creating a demand for residential and commercial development in the area.

### C. Early Residential Development

Many of the homes in East Cambridge date from 1820-1870 and represent the progression of architectural styles from the early-to-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. East Cambridge housewrights initially built basic two-room wood-frame gable-end workers cottages. For the rest of the century they followed three primary house plans, all survivals from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These included a four-room center-hall plan, a two-room center-hall plan, and a side-hall plan. As the century passed housewrights followed the same plans but decorated the exteriors in the Federal, Greek Revival, and Italianate styles. These forms were used in single-family detached dwellings, double houses and rowhouses.



East Cambridge in 1854

H.F. Walling, Map of the City of Cambridge (CHC)

Some of the earliest structures in East Cambridge were the rowhouses located at 45-51 Gore Street. The four brick houses have been modified over the years but were constructed in 1821 by the

Lechmere Point Corporation as speculative houses in a high architectural standard to bolster development in the newly platted neighborhood. Though in varied levels of architectural integrity with altered rooflines and detailing, much of the original fenestration and form remains.



Lechmere Point Corporation Houses (1821), 45-51 Gore Street. The two units on the right show the original roof form.

The Winter Street National Register District includes sixteen houses, fourteen of which were worker's cottages built before 1854. Many early residents of the area were employed by the New England Glass Company, whose factory was located across Bridge Street (now Monsignor O'Brien Highway). The district is the best-preserved streetscape of workers cottages in East Cambridge. The homes are typically 1½-story gable-end frame dwellings with entrances at the side yards. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it was common for managers of industry to live near their employees, as seen by the Thomas Leighton House, 22 Winter Street (1834), which follows the same building form at a larger scale.



Winter Street Worker's Cottages, c.1940

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Thomas Leighton House, 22 Winter Street, in ca. 1860 and 2016



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As East Cambridge became more of an established neighborhood, larger, Greek Revival homes were constructed, mostly around the Middlesex County complex. Greek Revival homes with make up a majority of homes in East Cambridge and can be found in forms ranging from rowhouses to detached single-family dwellings. The style is characterized by Greek and Classical features including gables serving as pediments, columns and pilasters, and bold entablatures above entrances and at the roofline.

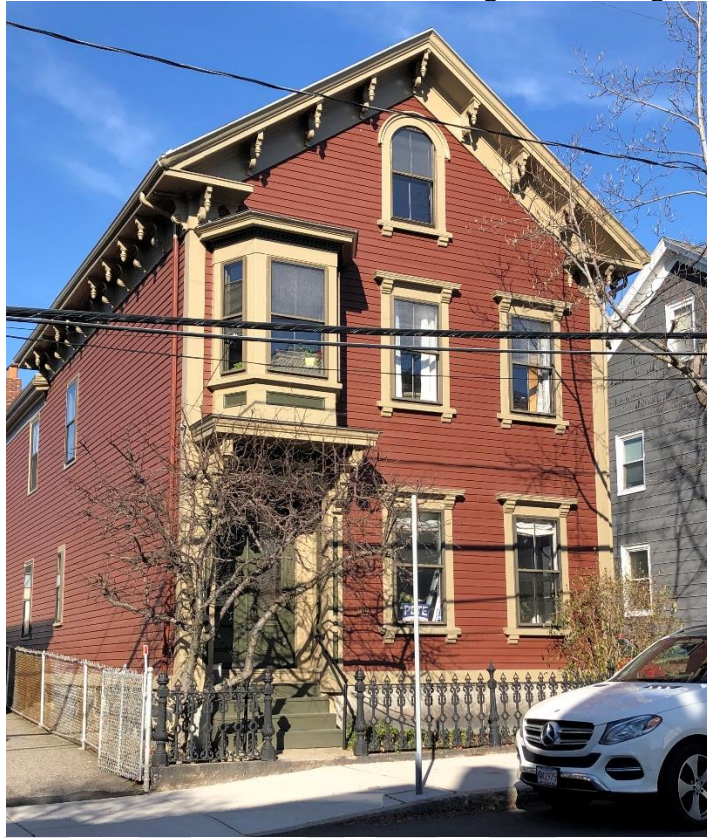


Greek Revival rowhouses (1842) at 36-46 Second Street

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The Italianate style emerged from the Greek Revival style and proliferated in the neighborhood until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to the boxy forms that maximized profits for builders. Early examples commonly borrowed the gable roof and side-hall plan vocabulary from the Greek Revival homes built earlier, but were distinguished by their brackets, door and window hoods, oriels, and arched windows.

Later examples featured wide overhanging eaves and brackets. Instances of the Italianate style are found in detached, double-houses, rows, and tenements throughout the neighborhood.



109 Thorndike St. (1857), a well-preserved example of the Italianate style with characteristic features. CHC



6-14 Max Avenue (1889), a later example of the Italianate style as a multi-family tenement building. CHC

Early workers housing contrasted with more substantial housing built later for Boston commuters and courthouse-related professionals. This early suburban development centered near the courthouse,

along "Quality Row" on Second and Third Streets and up Otis Street to the crown of Putnam Hill, a stretch which became known as "Millionaire's Row". The row at 83-95 Third Street makes up some of the highest-style residential architecture in East Cambridge. The brick row features brownstone trim and mansard roofs punctured by dormers and represents the Second Empire style of architecture.



"Quality Row" (1860) 83-95 Third Street.

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Later styles including the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival are rare in East Cambridge. Housing construction in East Cambridge virtually ceased after 1900, when all available sites had been developed. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, larger apartment complexes including the Truman Apartments (1968) at 27 Eighth Street and Thorndike Place (1986) at 217 Thorndike Street, displaced earlier houses.

#### D. Churches, School, and Public Buildings

Many churches were constructed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the population continued to grow, with industries bringing in immigrant communities from various European countries. The churches of East Cambridge have changed along with its population, but the sites and some buildings have remained since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Earliest extant churches include the Third Congregational Church on Third Street (1827) in the Federal style and the Second Baptist Church (now St. Francis of Assisi) on Cambridge Street (1838, remodeled 1868, 1890 and 1930). The largest church in the neighborhood, Sacred Heart (1874), is among the best examples of Victorian Gothic architecture in the city. A number of churches closed due to dwindling



140 Otis Street (1895), a rare Colonial Revival house in East Cambridge.



membership in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with some razed and others converted to other uses, including the modest St. Hedwig's Church at 99 Otis Street (1939) which was converted to residential use in 1998.



St. Hedwig's Church (1939) at 99 Otis Street. CHC

As early as 1811, the citizens of East Cambridge petitioned the town government to establish a school in their district. The first school was built by 1818, and was followed almost every decade thereafter with a new building to accommodate the rapidly increasing population: the first Putnam School on Otis Street (1825), the Thorndike School and the Otis School (1830s), and a replacement Putnam School (1840s). As East Cambridge continued to grow, the modest neighborhood schools became crowded and larger, more architecturally significant schools were built, many of which have been demolished. The third Putnam School on Otis Street (1887), the oldest extant school building in East Cambridge, was converted to housing in 1985. Many schools in Cambridge were consolidated, and larger, neighborhood schools were constructed. In 1968, the old Thorndike School on Spring Street was replaced by the Robert F. Kennedy School (1969). The Kennedy School is a typical example of a Mid-Century Modern school with minimal detailing and clean lines.



Third Putnam School (1887), 86 Otis Street.

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The civic buildings in East Cambridge make a definitive architectural statement in the neighborhood. The original Middlesex County Courthouse was designed by architect Charles Bulfinch in 1814. Although substantially rebuilt in 1848 under the supervision of Ammi B. Young, noted designer of Boston's Custom House and later Superintending Architect of the U.S. Treasury, the reconstruction closely followed Bulfinch's original conception. The historic Courthouse complex and the Registry of Deeds (1896) across Otis Street display a remarkable unity of design; architectural themes originated by Bulfinch were adopted by the various later architects to create a collective grouping of significant civic architecture. The adaptive reuse of the Old Superior Court and the Clerk of Courts building by Graham Gund in 1981 is complemented by Bulfinch Square Park, a plaza designed by landscape architect Carol R. Johnson.<sup>1</sup>

While the restoration and adaptive reuse of the court buildings has provided valuable open space and a revitalized core for the East Cambridge neighborhood, the future of the monumental Registry of Deed building is still undetermined. The Third District Court at 121 Third Street, designed by Charles Greco in 1931, also faces an uncertain future as the court system consolidates its facilities elsewhere. Historic preservation protections should be in place before they are deaccessioned by the state.



Middlesex County Complex – Bulfinch Square before and after 1984 restoration by Graham Gund.

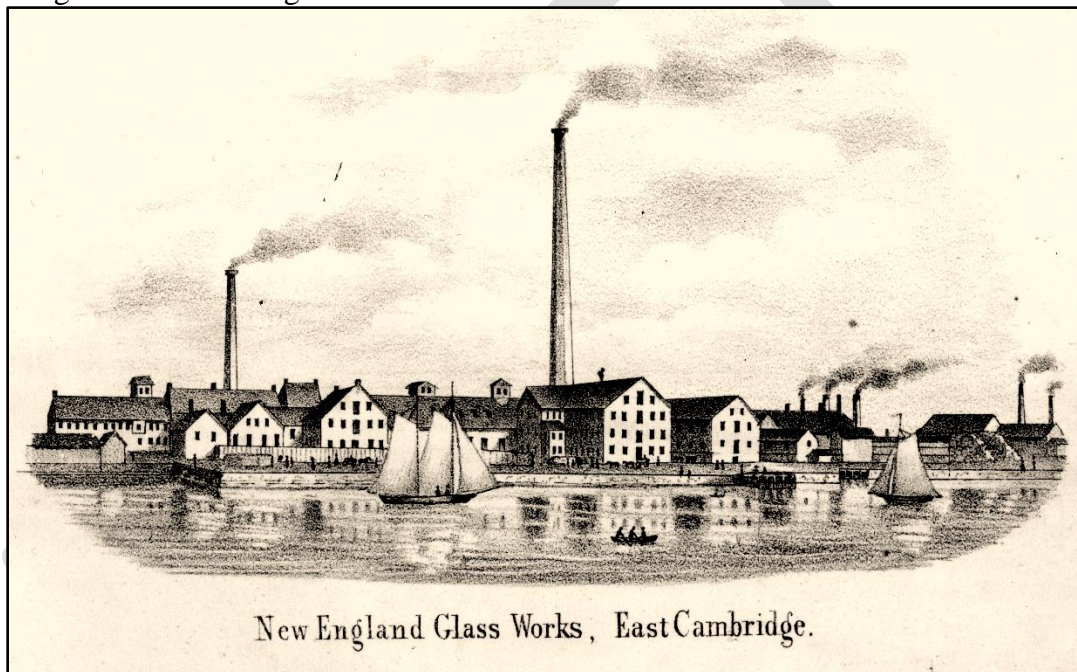
### E. Industrial Development

East Cambridge was the first part of Cambridge to undergo industrial development and until the 1880s was unrivaled as the industrial center of the city. Most of the early industrial enterprises needed access to water and road transportation and large areas of cheap waterfront land, and these were available in abundance in East Cambridge. The Charles and Miller's Rivers, although tidal, provided access to coastal shipping, while the Middlesex Canal and the Boston & Lowell, Fitchburg, Boston & Maine,

<sup>1</sup> The Middlesex Superior Courthouse, constructed in 1968, was excluded from the NCD study area.

and Grand Junction (Boston & Albany) railroads gave unparalleled access to the interior. Boston, a short walk across the Canal Bridge, provided both a market and a labor force.

In September 1813, the Lechmere Point Corporation's first land sale for industrial purposes was a large tract bounded by North Street, Water Street, Short Street and Miller's River purchased by Jesse Putnam of Boston of behalf of the Boston Porcelain & Glass Company. While the company was in operation just three years, it was the start of East Cambridge as the industrial center of the region. By 1845 the glass industry was the largest employer in the city. The most important single manufacturer was the New England Glass Company, which spanned most of the century from 1818 to 1888. At its peak, New England Glass employed more than 500 people. Next in prominence was the Bay State Glass Company on Bridge Street, although it operated less than 30 years and closed after the Panic of 1873. These two companies produced a diverse line of high-quality cut and engraved flint glass, ruby glass, and molded and pressed glass, as well as lamps and scientific instruments. The glass companies brought in many skilled laborers from West and Central Europe, many of whom, lived in tenements north of Bridge Street and along Winter and Gore Streets.



The New England Glass Works in 1854. H.F. Walling, Map of the City of Cambridge (CHC)

East Cambridge's early industries settled on the periphery, close to water transportation. Most located north of Bridge Street because of easier access to the harbor, but a few industries chose Third Street locations south of the courthouse and jail, among them the New England Glass Bottle Company (1826-1845) and Stratton, Sherriff & Company, brush manufacturers (ca. 1847-1868). These areas were isolated from residential and commercial development, as well as removed from traffic over the bridge. The Bottle House Block at 204-214 Third Street (1827) is a remnant of this era.

Meat processing facilities located in East Cambridge as it offered not only an inexpensive, spacious location but also the advantage of easy waste disposal in the tidal waters of the Miller's River. John P. Squire's pork packing business, which occupied 22 acres on Gore Street and employed a thousand workers at its peak in the 1890s, was by far the largest industry in East Cambridge until the complex was destroyed by fire in 1963.



J.P. Squire's complex (right) from Medford Street, ca. 1946.

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The significance of industrial development in the history of East Cambridge cannot be understated. The influx of working-class jobs and land for development allowed immigrant communities to thrive, creating a diverse community which remains to this day.

#### F. Development Trends

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the dense housing development which typifies East Cambridge and the heavy industries that were expanding north of the Broad Canal met along Bent Street. In the 1890s, the days of single-family detached and row houses in East Cambridge were over. Most desirable land was already developed, and later developers sought to maximize land value with the construction of less-expensive tenement housing. The development of dense working-class housing encouraged the outflow of the middle-class residents at the center of the neighborhood. Little new development occurred in the neighborhood before all construction ceased at the onset of the Depression in 1929. The gradual revival of construction elsewhere in Cambridge after 1960 barely touched the neighborhood.

As with many industrial and urban areas after World War II, East Cambridge suffered from suburbanization and consolidation of industries which in turn, caused many residents to move to the suburbs for jobs and more land. A few apartment complexes and townhomes replaced modest housing and

industrial developments in the 1980s, though these instances were not common and East Cambridge remained mostly intact. At this time, many homes and businesses were updated with materials which were available at the time, including asphalt shingles, Permatone, and vinyl siding, often covering historic materials. Additionally, it was common for new windows to be installed, altering historic fenestration with larger picture windows.

In the 1980s and 1990s several former industrial buildings on the periphery of the neighborhood were repurposed for housing or offices, and many others were razed and redeveloped. Development spread from Kendall Square's success northward into the southern edge of East Cambridge.

While East Cambridge long seemed isolated from outside influences, it is apparent that the surrounding development in Kendall Square and Cambridge Crossing have made East Cambridge a more desirable location for investors and homeowners.



137 Otis Street ca.1946, with recently altered fenestration. CHC.



84-94 Thorndike Street in 1970 (left) and 2020 (right). Changed window configuration disrupted the continuity of the block.

Development pressure in East Cambridge has caused many life-long and multi-generational residents to leave the neighborhood, often selling their properties to developers or owners who embark on large rehabilitation projects to bring the homes up to modern housing standards. In the process of these renovations, synthetic siding and enclosures are removed and at times, uncover historic fabric. While some developers and owners attempt to restore these features, others seek to lower costs of exterior

renovations to maximize interior amenities and programming. At 66-68 Otis Street (1846) a developer removed siding as part of a gut renovation and discovered historic detailing underneath. The original architectural features were removed and the historic window openings were altered to accommodate smaller windows at the second floor. The design called for four separate entrances at the street until the building was given an emergency landmark hearing and protected from further incompatible alterations.



**66-68 Otis Street**

Several buildings in East Cambridge have been recently received “gut” renovations that included removal of all features inside and out, leaving just a shell of the building to work within. This may be necessary to upgrade structures to meet modern codes, but it need not be destructive to historic features that contribute to neighborhood character.

#### G. Cambridge Street as a Commercial Corridor



Cambridge Street at Third Street, looking east in 1934

BERy collection, CHC

Cambridge Street has served as the major transportation and commercial corridor of the neighborhood since it was laid out in 1809. The street bisects the residential neighborhood and is lined with a broad assortment of uses, styles and periods of construction, representing a cross-section of development of

the greater neighborhood. As a commercial district, Cambridge Street exhibits a human scale and architectural variety that make it attractive for local retailers and services. Commercial buildings on Cambridge Street are quite modest in comparison to its civic structures. Historically, East Cambridge's population was too small and downtown Boston was too close for the area to develop a significant business district that would draw customers from outside the area, but in recent years a few distinctive shops and restaurants have begun to make Cambridge Street a destination for the broader community.

Cambridge Street between Second and Sciarappa streets established itself as the retail center of East Cambridge by 1850. Buildings west of Sciarappa remained predominantly residential until population growth later in the century encouraged many homeowners to build storefront additions or open stores on their ground floors. Only two owners resisted this trend, as can be seen at 369-371 Cambridge Street (1825) and 379-381 Cambridge Street (1837).



379-381 Cambridge Street (1837) 367-371 Cambridge Street (1825)

By 1857, retail stores made up two-thirds of all businesses on Cambridge Street, with tradesmen and professionals moving elsewhere. In the subsequent decades, many homes were altered or replaced with modest, wood-frame commercial buildings with retail on the ground floor and apartments above. Typically constructed in the Italianate style, which was popular at the time, the buildings widely feature flat roofs and overhanging eaves with brackets. In the 1880s, Cambridge Street witnessed a development boom west of Fifth Street, when many houses on the street were moved to the rear of their lots or elsewhere for larger commercial structures built to the street.

Many storefronts were added to houses as demand for space increased on Cambridge Street. This trend continued through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Storefronts were often affixed to the front of the buildings, filling up the yards to the lot lines and occupying entire ground floors. An example of this



635 Cambridge Street (1867) with new storefront, 1906.

can be seen at 635 Cambridge Street (1867), a three-story Italianate building which was given a storefront in 1900 for a shoe store. This became the site of a popular bar that remains in business today.

Storefronts were set into homes or apartment buildings when building out to the street was not possible. The house at 450 Cambridge Street (1856), with a 1901 storefront alteration, retains the side-hall entrance that provides access to the residential units above. A new entrance and plate glass window were added for the retail use. Subsequent alterations include the perma-stone cladding, popular in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Most purpose-built commercial buildings in East Cambridge are relatively modest in comparison with its civic and institutional structures, yet some prominent masonry commercial structures remain on Cambridge Street between Third and Sciarappa streets. N. F. Goldsmith's three story building at 303-305 Cambridge Street (1876) is a rare example of elaborate Italianate brick masonry inset with encaustic decorative tiles. McCloskey & Harty's four story mixed use block next door at 307-313 (1898) is a more modest but still substantial work of architecture. Casket manufacturer William L. Lockhart's Queen Anne mixed-use block at 337-343 Cambridge Street in 1883 features bracketed eaves and a two-story projecting bay that provides architectural diversity above the ground level.



450 Cambridge Street (1856) with inserted storefront from 1901.



303-305 Cambridge Street (right) and 307-313 Cambridge Street (left)





William L. Lockhart's Block, 337-343 Cambridge Street (1883)

Notable bank buildings include the Lechmere Bank (1917) a Classical Revival structure which was recently incorporated into converted to a pharmacy development, and the East Cambridge Savings Bank (1931), a significant Art Deco design with compatible 1970s addition.



East Cambridge Savings Bank (left), constructed in 1931, with 1977 addition (right).

After WWII and through the 1980s, several significant structures between Second and Sciarappa streets were replaced with modern buildings and many others were remodeled with post-war finishes.



Former Hastings-Tapley Building, 271 Cambridge Street (1984)

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At the far west end of Cambridge Street in East Cambridge the Lechmere Theater was razed in 1957 and replaced by the Pavilion in 1986. Next to the railroad tracks a service garage was replaced by a



Cambridge Street looking east from the railroad crossing, 1974

neighborhood health center associated with the LBJ Apartments in 1974, itself now demolished. In the same area the one-story stables adjacent to the 1869 Union Railroad Car barn at 619 Cambridge Street were demolished or remodeled in 1962. While this site seemingly offers an opportunity for greater density, a recent sale prefigures a remodeling at the current scale.

While current zoning would allow greater heights and density on Cambridge Street, future development must be balanced with preservation of significant buildings and careful design of replacement structures to preserve the eclectic character of the business district.



Union Railway Car barn (1869) at 619 Cambridge Street in 1899 (top) and 1970 (bottom).