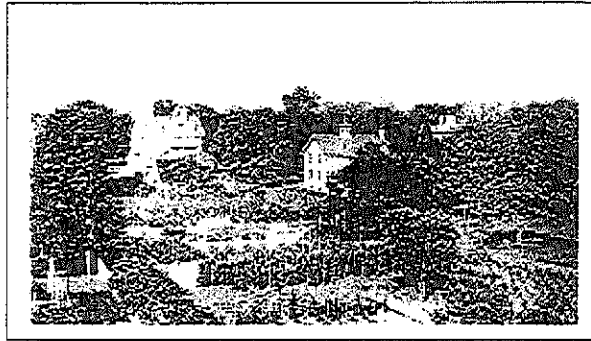
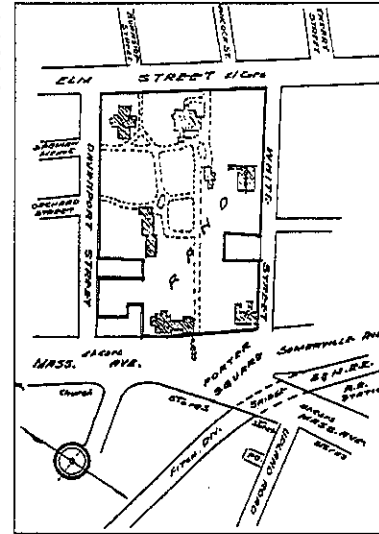


# Rand Estate



A view of the estate in 1885, taken from Massachusetts Avenue. The main house, in the left background, faced Elm Street in Somerville.

The Rand estate about 1920. The family owned four houses and two barns, but most of their land was occupied by gardens and lawns.



For a century before it became a shopping center, this block was the parklike estate of the Rands, a wealthy Cambridge family.

Benjamin Rand, a carriage maker, built a house facing North (now Massachusetts) Avenue in 1813 and in 1821 acquired a two-acre field that ran back to Elm Street. In 1855 he built a much larger and more elaborate house facing Elm Street and gave it to his son, Boston leather merchant Henry Clay Rand, as a wedding present. After Henry's death, the whole estate passed to his son, Harry Rand, and his daughter-in-law, Mabel.

Henry Clay Rand's house, a fine suburban mansion in the Italianate style, presided over a well-tended landscape of wide lawns, flourishing gardens, and winding footpaths. Here cattle grazed, horses were stabled,

and, later, Harry and Mabel Rand's automobiles were tended by their chauffeur in an ample garage behind the house. Despite their proximity to Porter Square Station, which had been the nucleus of the area since 1843, the Rands resisted the development of their land for nearly a hundred years.

Mabel Rand outlived her husband and died childless in 1950. She wished to preserve the estate after her death and endowed a fund for its upkeep, but no public or private body would accept the bequest. In 1952 her executors sold the property to developers, who also acquired and razed a dozen other houses on White and Davenport streets.

When the Porter Square Shopping Center opened in 1956, it rapidly replaced the old business district near the corner of Massachusetts Avenue

and Walden Street. Several substantial buildings there were replaced by filling stations and fast-food outlets or vacant lots. The new shopping center was as typical a feature of mid-20th-century suburbia as the Rand estate had been of the century before.

Sources:

- Cambridge Historical Commission, *Report Five: Northwest Cambridge*. Cambridge, 1977.
- Cambridge Historical Commission, Rand collection (photograph).
- Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Boston, Rand family collection (map).

