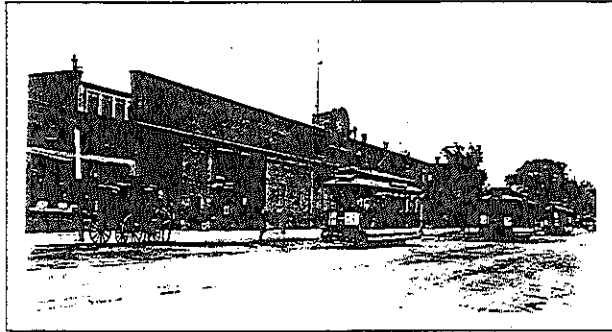


# Streetcar Barns



This brick carhouse was built in 1897 to accommodate electric streetcars, which replaced horsecars on this route in 1889.

Public transportation was essential to the 19<sup>th</sup> century development of North Cambridge. Massachusetts Avenue had been the major traffic artery through North Cambridge since colonial times, when it linked the village at Harvard Square with the interior of Middlesex County. Farmers used it to reach the markets in Boston, but the only public accommodation was an infrequent stagecoach.

Suburban development began in 1843, when the Charlestown Branch Railroad began carrying passengers from Porter Square to Charlestown. The fare was expensive, however, and the train served only those who lived within walking distance of the station. Horse-drawn omnibuses, which were introduced in 1847 on a route between Arlington and Boston, were cheap but uncomfortable.

In 1854, local businessmen organized the Cambridge Railroad and laid tracks in the streets from Boston to Harvard Square along the route of the present subway. The line was soon extended out Brattle Street to Mount Auburn Cemetery and up Massachusetts Avenue to Porter Square, where a carbarn was built on the corner of Upland Road. When horsecar service began, the *Cambridge Chronicle* reported with enthusiasm that “fifty persons can be drawn in a car, by two horses, with more ease and comfort than can half that number in an omnibus, drawn by four.” In 1859 the North Cambridge line was extended to Alewife Brook to join the new West Cambridge Railroad. Arlington residents paid an 18-cent fare to Boston; Cambridge passengers paid 10 cents.

The first carbarn on this site, a handsome brick building with a great

clock and monumental doors, was built in 1874 by the Union Railway and remained in use until the introduction of electric streetcars in 1889. The West End Street Railway put up a larger and more impressive carhouse around the original structure in 1897, but this was razed by the Boston Elevated Railway in 1937. The present structure was built in 1979 to house the trolley buses that replaced streetcars on this route in 1958.

The cheap fares and rapid service brought by electrification made North Cambridge a practical place to live for factory workers as well as for businessmen. Developers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century rapidly divided the remaining farmland along Massachusetts Avenue and built hundreds of new houses. North Cambridge soon became the home of upwardly mobile families seeking suburban homes away from the factory districts of East Cambridge and Cambridgeport.

#### Sources:

*Cambridge Chronicle*, March 29, 1856.  
Cambridge Historical Commission, *Report Five: Northwest Cambridge*. Cambridge, 1977.  
Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (photo)

