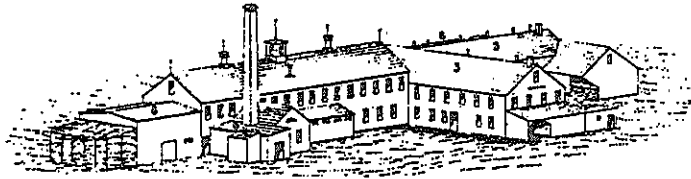


Tannery Brook

MULLER'S TANNERY,

(J. Muller.)
N. CAMBRIDGE, MASS.



In the mid-19th century, North Cambridge was an isolated community on the fringe of a rapidly expanding city, and attracted several necessary but unpleasant activities that would not have been tolerated in settled areas.

In 1845, Philip Hoffman, a German immigrant, purchased part of the old Dickson farm and opened a tannery at the present intersection of Churchill and Muller avenues. The Civil War stimulated the leather trade, and William Muller expanded the Hoffman tannery in 1864. The next year, Ferdinand Fischer, a former Muller employee, built another tannery, and in 1866 Michael Kubler opened a third nearby.

The tanneries were foul and unsanitary neighbors. Tannery Brook provided water for processing the raw hides, but could not carry away all

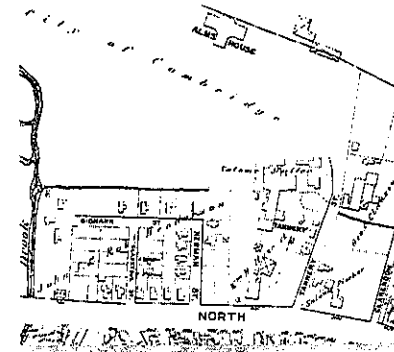
the waste that was generated there. The only neighbors were the inmates of the almshouse that was erected by the City of Cambridge in 1851, but they were powerless to complain.

After the horsecars were electrified in 1889, the far reaches of North Cambridge became attractive for suburban development. The new owners of the houses that went up in 1892 on land the Mullers sold on Bismarck (now Foch), Gladstone, and Newman Streets immediately complained about the noxious odors from the tanneries. The Cambridge Board of Health agreed that "the stench arising from the tannery was a serious detriment to the neighborhood and a breeder of ill health," and ordered that the rendering operations, in which animal carcasses were boiled to remove their fat, be closed immediately.

In the late 1920s, the remaining tannery operations ceased and the buildings were demolished. The brook was enclosed in a drain and the land filled and leveled. Beginning in 1928, Muller and Richard Avenues were laid out across the old tannery grounds and Matignon Avenue and Murray Hill Road crossed the old Almshouse fields. By 1930, the entire neighborhood was fully built up with suburban houses.

Sources:

Cambridge Chronicle, Sept. 3 1892.
Cambridge Historical Commission, *Report Five: Northwest Cambridge*. Cambridge, Mass., 1977
G. M. Hopkins, *Atlas of Cambridge, Mass.* Philadelphia, 1894



Houses gradually surrounded the tanneries on land that the factory owners themselves had sold for development, as seen here in an 1894 map.

