

FINDING AID
Clark Street Photographs
Taken by City Engineering Department, June 1901

Cambridge Historical Commission
831 Massachusetts Ave
Cambridge, MA 02139

Extent: 1 linear foot

Processed by: Lauren Buie, June-September 2013

Provenance: Donated to the Cambridge Historical Commission by the City Engineering Department in 1985.

Access: Collection is available for research; CHC rules of use apply.

Description: The photographs, taken in June 1901, focus on a single block of Clark Street between Washington to the north and School to the south. At the time, Clark Street, a crowded residential street in The Port (also known as Area 4), ran north to south from Webster Avenue to Main Street.

The Port developed in the early nineteenth-century and comprised a dense, changeable mix of industry, small companies such as lumber- and coal-yards, and housing (primarily tenements and multi-family residences). When the photographs were taken, the area's major industry was soap-making, dominated by Lever Brothers. Other factories produced desks, paper boxes, and organs and pianos; a small cosmetics company was nearby. Iron foundries and a large rubber factory grew up at the north end of Clark. The residents were a mix of poor white and black Americans and immigrants, including Irish, Russian Jews, Lithuanians, Portuguese, Polish, Swedes, Greeks, Canadians, West Indians, and Barbadians; many worked in the neighborhood. In 1941, Clark Street disappeared beneath a new public housing development.

In 1901, Cambridge's Superintendent of Streets directed the Engineering Department to document the work on Clark Street, which included new processes being used to improve Cambridge streets. The photos show the street before and after the work; the "afters" show a macadamized street, brick sidewalks, and the installation of drains. [Prior to the upgrade to brick sidewalks, duckboards (platforms of wooden slats) flanked the streets in poorer neighborhoods like The Port.]

In addition to the work performed by the Street Department, the photos offer a unique view of working-class housing at a turning point in building technology. Typically, older one- and two-story houses, many of which had been built in the first half of the nineteenth century, lacked indoor plumbing and required the inhabitants to use outhouses; the newer triple-deckers, which appeared as early as the 1860's, had modern plumbing.

Many children appear in the photos; a mother leans out of a second floor window. The photos illustrate the diversity of the street and neighborhood.

Scope and Content: The photos were taken on June 1 and June 3, 1901, by the City Engineering Department to document improvements to Clark Street between Washington and School streets. (For more information on the project, see *City of Cambridge Annual Reports*, 1901, and Cambridge atlases for 1894 and 1903.) There are sixteen photos with a set of duplicates. Copies of the photos are in the Clark Street survey file. Details of the images illustrate the *Guide to the Cambridge African American Heritage Trail*.

Bibliography

- Cambridge Historical Commission. *Guide to Cambridge African American Heritage Trail*, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge Historical Commission, 2000
- Cambridge Historical Commission. "Report Three: Cambridgeport." *Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971.
- Cambridge, Mass., Office of the Mayor. "Address of the Mayor upon the Organization of the City Government." Cambridge, Mass., 1901.
- Hail, Christopher. *Cambridge Buildings and Architects*. January 21, 2003.
hul.harvard.edu/lib/archives/refshelf/cba (accessed September 16, 2013).

Item List:

- Photo 1. 208 Washington Street, 196 Washington Street
- Photo 2. 196 Washington Street, 208 Washington Street
- Photo 3. 46 Clark Street, 54 Clark Street
- Photo 4. 54 Clark Street, 46 Clark Street
- Photo 5. 46 Clark Street, corner Clark Street Place, 14-16 Clark Street (brick)
- Photo 6. 41-55 Clark Street
- Photo 7. 55 Clark Street

Photo 8. Looking into orchard at 41 Clark Street (wood), 37-39 Clark Street (brick), [35] Clark Street (brick) corner of School Street

Photo 9. 41 Clark Street (wood), 37-39 Clark Street (brick), [35] Clark Street (brick) corner of School Street

Photo 10. [35] Clark Street (just brick wall at left), 45-47 School Street (left), 46 Clark Street (triple deck beyond, on corner of Clark St Place)

Photo 11. 14-16 Clark Street

Photo 12. [35] Clark Street, 37-39 Clark Street (corner), roof of long barn 59 School Street

Photo 13. [35] Clark Street, 45-47 School Street (middle)

Photo 14. Long barn belonging to 59 School Street, [35] Clark Street (left middle), 45-47 School Street (right)

Photo 15. [35] Clark Street (demolition), barn at 59 School Street

August 30, 2013

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