

Trotting Park



Lady Suffolk, made famous in a popular song as "the old gray mare," set a course record of 2:26 at North Cambridge in 1849. Her trainer, Hiram Woodruff, managed the course and was the author of a history of trotting.

"In 1837, a trotting race course opened on fifty acres of land bounded by today's Rindge Avenue and Harvey, Cedar, and Clifton Streets. Its full mile track looped between the Massachusetts Central railroad bed to the north and the Catholic Cemetery to the south, and a large hotel and tavern, the Trotting Park House, stood along the track's Cedar Street length near the grandstand" (Cambridge Chronicle, August 22, 1908).

Organized trotting-horse races were a uniquely American phenomenon that enjoyed widespread popularity in the 19th century. The first course opened on Long Island in 1827, and "trotting parks" soon appeared in Manhattan and Philadelphia. The North Cambridge track was the principal racing venue in the Boston area from 1837 to 1855, and many famous horses raced here.

Trotting horses were especially popular in the north, where horse racing was regarded as an elitist pastime. Unlike the all-out gallop, the trot was a moderate and practical gait that could be sustained all day by a good saddle horse. Since hardy road horses were indispensable to rich and poor alike, competition between them was condoned as a democratic means of improving the breed.

In 1837, Francis Kidder, whose family owned much of the area, formed a partnership to develop a trotting course on the old family farm. North Cambridge's clay soil formed an excellent surface for a hard, smooth, and level track. The proximity of the cattle market at Porter Square ensured its success, and in 1847 Kidder and a new partner, Samuel Reed, put up a hotel next to the grandstand.

In 1855, racing ended and the course was surveyed for 275 house lots, the largest subdivision in the history of Cambridge. Samuel Reed continued to operate the Trotting Park House as a boarding house for brickyard workers. In 1870, the hotel was remodelled as a tenement, which still stands at Cedar Square.

Sources:

Boston Daily Mall, May 9, 1845.

Cambridge Chronicle, June 21, 1849, May 26, 1855, and August 22, 1908.

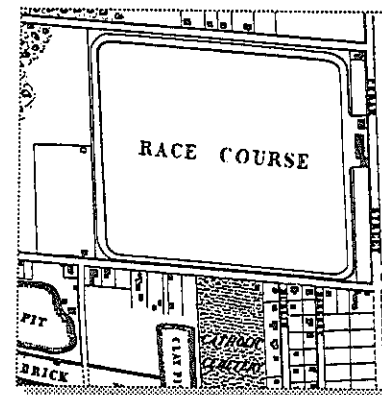
Cambridge Historical Commission, *Report Five: Northwest Cambridge*. Cambridge, 1977.

Smithsonian Institution. Untitled lithograph [Lady Suffolk]. Artist, publisher, place, and date unknown.

H.F. Walling, "Map of Cambridge." Boston, 1854.

Peter C. Welsh, *Track and Road: The American Trotting Horse*. Washington, 1967.

Hiram Woodruff, *The Trotting Horse of America*. Boston, 1868.



The boundaries of the course were Rindge Avenue and Cedar, Harvey, and Clifton streets. This map was made in 1854, a year before racing ended here.

