



325. East Cambridge Savings Bank, 292 Cambridge Street, 1931, Thomas M. James, Addition (right), 1976, Charles Hilgenhurst Associates

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326. Interior, East Cambridge Savings Bank, looking toward 1976 addition 9

the Cambridge Street facade of the bank. The bay was then reattached to the old building by a steel-framed glass arcade, whose ribs repeat the curve of the arched windows. The addition is ingenious and respects the architecture of the original.

The only new bank in East Cambridge in recent years is the unprepossessing Shawmut County Bank, at 160 Cambridge Street, designed in 1965 by Symmes, Maini & McKee. While the Shawmut County Bank and BayBank/Middlesex are branches, the East Cambridge Savings Bank retains its neighborhood orientation of a hundred years ago. In an age of regional bank holding companies, it is conscious of its roots to an exceptional degree and is the only bank in East Cambridge that has a sense of the past.

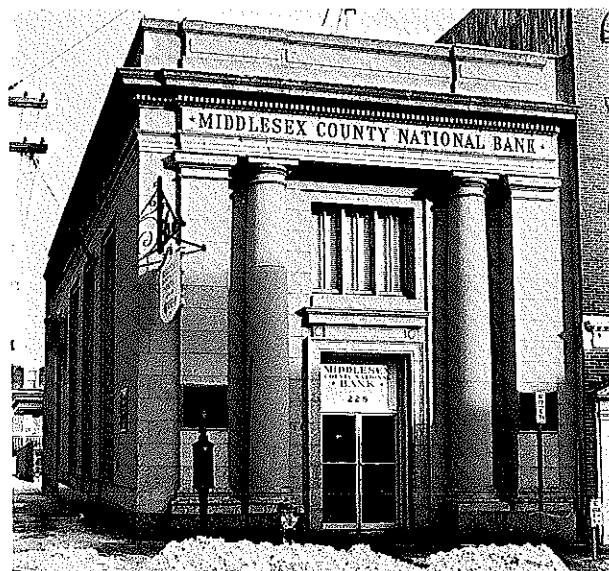
Retail Stores

The earliest business center in East Cambridge was near the western end of the Craigie Bridge — an area that has since been entirely rebuilt. The first documented store stood until 1977 at 26 Gore Street, on the corner of Second (Fig. 327). A store had stood at this location as early as 1829 and was run by John Palmer as a grocery from 1830 on. In 1839, Palmer built a new building and kept his store there until he retired in 1881. Beginning in 1886, the greater part of the building was occupied by Patrick McElroy's glass factory, the last to operate in East Cambridge.

This brick building with foundation, sills, and flush lintels of granite was capped by a roof that was both hip and gable, a solution that results when two ridge roofs meet at right angles. The clear geometric quality of the Late Georgian design and the crisp cornice of diagonally set bricks are typical of East Cambridge vernacular buildings of the 1830s. The interior did not have the living quarters that were generally provided on a store's upper levels and that were suggested by the fenestration. The second floor served as a storage area, except for a corner office, and the walls were left unplastered. An interior hoist was just inside the door at the west end of the facade. The entire third floor contained a meeting hall.



323. East Cambridge Savings Bank, 292 Cambridge Street, 1894, Eugene T. Harrington 1063



324. Lechmere Bank, 225 Cambridge Street, 1917, Thomas M. James. Photograph c. 1967 J-90

faced with stone. The facade was one of great decorum — symmetrical, lined with Ionic columns, and finished at the corners with paired pilasters — with the name of the bank etched proudly into the frieze. The whole spoke of solidity, security, and permanence — a little stone temple to savings. The savings bank was getting not only a headquarters but also a piece of advertising.

The Lechmere Bank moved to 337 Cambridge Street in 1895, when its original building was taken by the county, and in 1904 moved to 221 Cambridge Street, the site of the Cambridge National Bank, which had gone out of business that year. In 1917, the bank hired the Boston architect Thomas M. James to design a new building on the adjoining lot at 225 Cambridge Street.

James provided a structure of cast stone in imitation of white limestone, with monumental Doric columns. This Roman temple is the very image of conservative dignity that banks on almost every Main Street sought

to emulate in the 1920s (Fig. 324). In 1936, Lechmere merged with the National Bank of Malden and the Everett Bank & Trust to form the Middlesex County National Bank, which in turn evolved into BayBank/Middlesex, which still occupies the building.

Not to be outdone, the East Cambridge Savings Bank hired James in 1931 to design a new headquarters on the site of its 1895 Neoclassical building, diagonally across the street from the Lechmere Bank (Fig. 325). This building was far more original than James' earlier work. A granite cube pierced by arched windows on three sides houses the main banking room. A brick wing, of the same height but divided into two floors, extends from the rear and contains the boardroom and additional work space. The building greatly benefited from James' collaboration with the New York sculptor Paul Fjelde, who designed the elaborate exterior carving as well as the paired bronze doors.

While the carving along the frieze may seem abstract, a close inspection of the leafy swirls and winged dogs reveals figures representing Industry, Commerce, and Agriculture. Flat geometrical figures decorating the bronze doors also portray industrial themes: farming, fishing, spinning, and mining. The care paid to exterior decoration carried over to the interior, with its marble walls and counters, bronze counter screens, floridly carved arches, painted ceiling, Byzantine hanging lamps, and stainless steel vault (Fig. 326).

Stylistically, this bank has been described as somewhere between Italian Romanesque and Byzantine, but it is perhaps more accurate to say that James drew elements from both these styles and from the contemporary Art Deco to create an image of prosperity and security. The project was undertaken at the height of the Depression, and for the savings bank to put up an expensive building in such troubled times was a sign of financial stability. The bank also provided jobs for East Cambridge artisans and won the enduring loyalty of many.

The East Cambridge Savings Bank is one of the area's architectural gems. The 1976 addition by the firm of Charles Hilgenhurst adds to its architectural interest. The designers, Warren Schwartz and Robert Silver, detached the last arched bay on the western facade and rotated it 90 degrees, making it even with

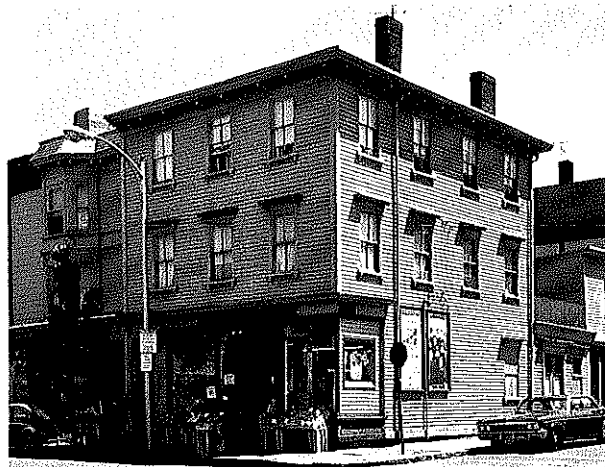


336. 610-622 Cambridge Street, 1869, H. B. Dennison. Photograph 1969

226/25



337. 232-236 Hurley Street, 1872-73. Photograph 1965



338. 414 Cambridge Street, 1860. Photograph 1969

216/18

EDWIN H. BLAKE,
 DEALER IN
 Choice Family Groceries,
 FOREIGN & DOMESTIC GOODS,
 JELLIES, Etc.,
 CORNER OF CAMBRIDGE AND FIFTH STREETS,
 EAST CAMBRIDGE.

Goods delivered to any part of the City Free of expense.

339. Advertisement for Edwin H. Blake, 1865

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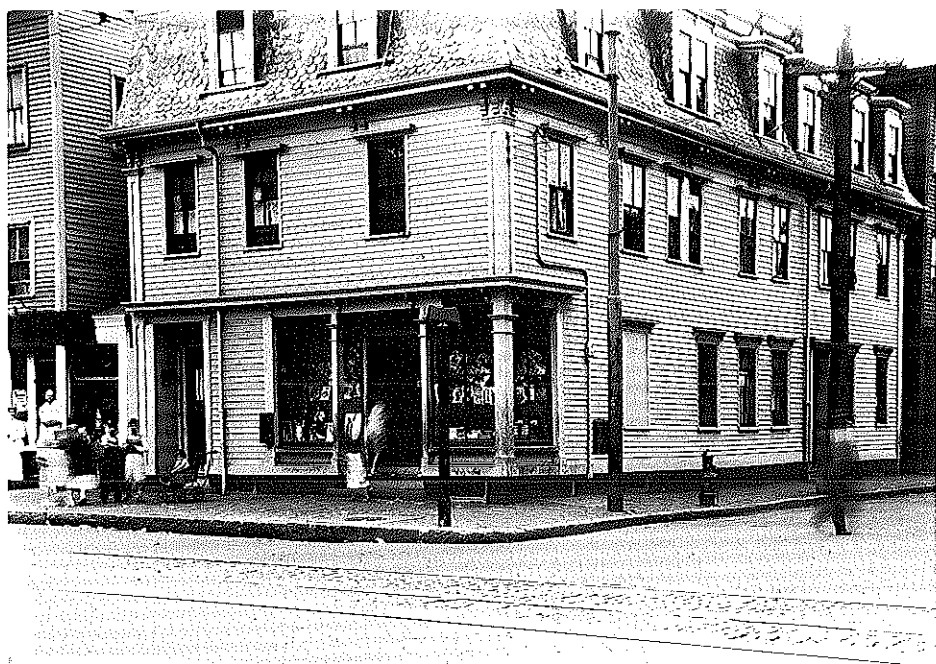
340. 425 Cambridge Street, 1824-25. Photograph 1969

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341. Cambridge Street looking east from Fifth, 1943

E-2453



329. 580 Cambridge Street, c. 1870. Photograph 1933

E/9052

330; demolished) and 519–525 Cambridge Street (1875), two entrances with their separate halls and stairs are placed together in the center of the composition, with stores at either side.

By 1857, retail stores made up two thirds of all the businesses on Cambridge Street. This proportion of retail to other businesses continued through 1873, although the actual number of firms almost tripled. As the number of stores increased, the retail business area grew west to Ninth Street, and many new shops opened between Fifth and Eighth streets.

Some of them occupied new commercial buildings that no longer reflected the earlier domestic patterns. A good example is the three-story brick block at 305 Cambridge Street (1876), which replaced a frame store (Fig. 331). Inset tiles and fancy brick panels and cornice enliven the second and third floors of the symmetrical facade. The wide center arched windows and the deep cornice are commercial rather than domestic in scale. The exact configuration of the first floor is unknown,

but there was probably one retail store and a door to the side leading to the upper floors.

Storefronts were also added to houses as the demand for space increased. Remaining examples include 425 Cambridge Street (see Fig. 340) and the 1871 storefronts added to 457–459 Cambridge Street (1848–49) so that the proprietors of a confectioner's and a shoe store could live above their businesses.

The 1870s also provide several examples of well-preserved storefronts along Cambridge Street. One of the best is 538–540 Cambridge Street, built in 1875–76 for Joseph Metzger, a watch crystal maker who originally established a restaurant in his new building and lived upstairs (Fig. 332). The symmetrical exterior of the building frankly expresses its dual use. Finely detailed identical recessed entrances flank the plate glass show window and give access to the commercial and living quarters, while a second-story bay window emphasizes the commercial space below. The scale of the show window seems domestic because the limited



330. Buck's Hall, 82–84 Cambridge Street, c. 1850. Photograph 1904

size of glass panes required the use of numerous dividing bars. This original ground floor with its wooden trim provides a valuable view of Cambridge Street's 19th-century character, which is all too rapidly disappearing.

The 1880s witnessed a burst of commercial building along Cambridge Street; some was new construction, some a remodeling of earlier structures. On June 30, 1883, the *Cambridge Chronicle* reported that "rebuilding, along Cambridge Street especially, is quite an important feature of East Cambridge business just at present." As Cambridge Street and particularly the area west of Fifth Street became more and more developed, it became usual to move houses to make room for larger commercial structures. In 1883, Joseph Wyzanski moved his dwelling from 403 Cambridge Street to 318 Hurley Street (see Fig. 202) in order to erect a three-story brick structure, which he used as a dry goods store (Fig. 333). This excellent Queen Anne building, with its corbeled brick cornice, segmental

The next generation of stores took advantage of the larger sheets of glass then becoming available, and employed display windows under granite lintels supported by iron piers. Reed's Hall at 161 Bridge Street (c. 1840) combined stores on the ground floor, probably apartments on the second, and a hall on the third (Fig. 328). In other respects, this building was very similar to residential buildings of the period (see Figs. 161–162).

By 1850, Cambridge Street had established itself as the retail center of East Cambridge, and a more complete picture of store architecture emerges. The ma-

majority of businesses listed in the 1851 Cambridge directory were still tradesmen and professionals—blacksmiths, carpenters, counselors—but there was a small core of retail stores between Second and Fourth streets. The stores included two bakers, four provision dealers, a bookstore, an apothecary, a dry goods store, and two shops selling crockery and glassware. None of the storefronts survives in its midcentury condition. West of Fourth Street, Cambridge Street remained predominantly residential, with freestanding houses such as 369–371 Cambridge Street (1825) and 379–381 Cambridge Street (1836), rather than the combined

stores and living quarters that characterized the retail area.

Store architecture at this time generally followed the same side-hall plan that dominated domestic architecture in East Cambridge (Fig. 329). An entrance on one side leads to a relatively narrow stair hall and thence to the living quarters above; the store takes up the rest of the ground floor. Essentially, the store occupies the space ordinarily reserved for double parlors in residential buildings of the period. Larger buildings generally follow the scheme of double houses or row houses. At 82–84 Cambridge Street (c. 1850) (Fig.

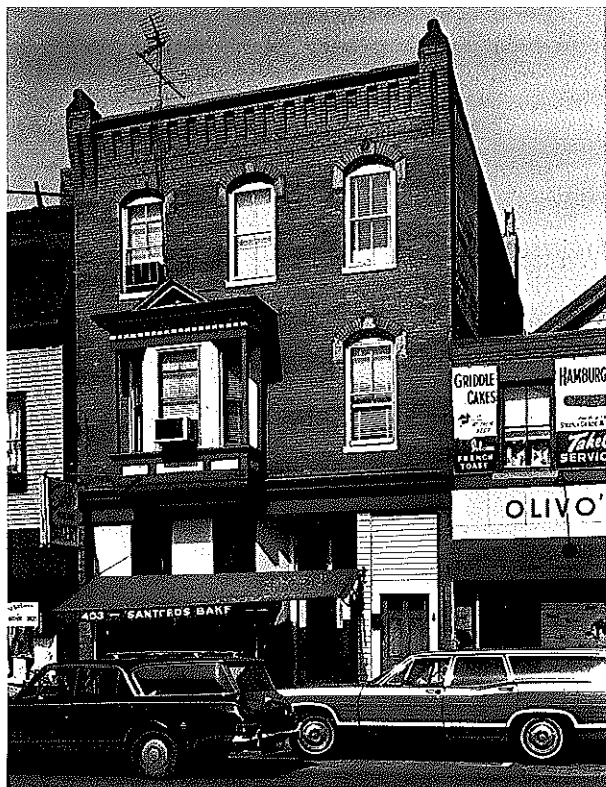


327. 26 Gore Street, 1839, demolished 1977. Photograph 1967

J-42



328. Reed's Hall, 161 Bridge Street, c. 1840. Demolished c. 1925. Photograph 1904



333. 403 Cambridge Street, 1883. Photograph 1964

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334. 187-191 and 201-203 Cambridge Street, 1889, E. K. & W. E. Blaikie. Photograph 1970

305/ra

arched windows, and second-floor oriel window, was much more elaborate than most of its neighbors. Unfortunately, the ground-floor store space has been remodeled, but the building as a whole is one of the finest commercial structures remaining in East Cambridge.

Similarly, in 1889 James Ferguson moved several wooden buildings on Cambridge Street and hired E. K. and W. E. Blaikie of Boston to design two Queen Anne brick blocks with rough stone trim at 187-191 and 201-203 (demolished) Cambridge Street (Fig. 334). With stores on the ground floor and apartments above, these four-story blocks accommodated nine families in large, five-room suites. Behind his substantial brick blocks, Ferguson built a large four-story wooden structure with no direct access to the street to house another twelve families.

Houses were also moved in the 1880s to the rear of lots to create new commercial frontage. In 1885, the 1824-25 double house at 467 Cambridge Street (see Fig. 143) was moved to the back of the lot and a large, three-story store, with plate glass windows and slender cast-iron columns (now removed), was built in its place at 469-471 Cambridge Street. The first floor of the new building was occupied by the George R. Brine & Company clothing firm and George Towne's kitchen equipment store, both of which benefited from the large display space.

The increase in business activity encouraged ever more effective use of prime retail space, sometimes resulting in the demolition of earlier buildings. The owner of a building on the northwest corner of Cambridge and Third streets stated in the *Chronicle* in 1888 that "it would be cheaper to commence from the foundation and build new rather than remodel or repair." He soon replaced the pre-1854 building there with a new grocery store with tenements above, and other owners along Cambridge Street followed suit.

As the volume of business and the need for larger areas of uninterrupted space increased, store plans were modified to create more display area. A corner building at 566 Cambridge Street placed the residential stairway on Seventh Street, thus allowing the full 50-foot Cambridge Street frontage to be used for commercial purposes. Similarly, the entrance stairs to 610-622 Cambridge Street were pushed to one end of the

MORAN BROTHERS, FURNITURE STORE,

238 Cambridge Street, cor. Ninth Street,

EAST CAMBRIDGE,

Cutlery, Crockery, Wooden and Glass Ware and Carpets.

335. Advertisement for Moran Brothers, 1874

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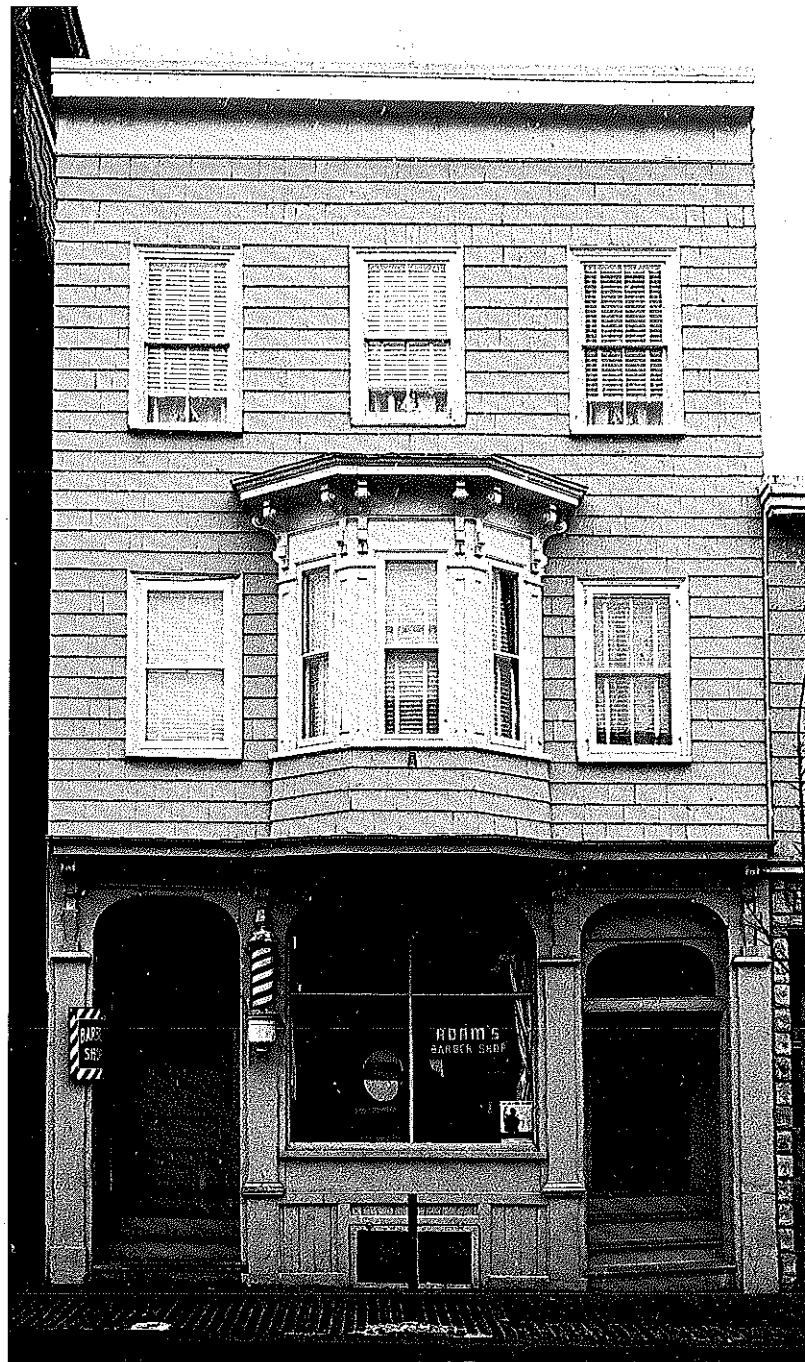
90-foot building to provide almost uninterrupted store frontage (Figs. 335-336). This arrangement created interior problems, however, because a long lateral hall on the second floor was necessary to reach the apartments along the front and back of the building.

In spite of the increase in commercial building and remodeling in the 1880s, the Cambridge Street business district remained fairly stable. Half the retail stores that existed in 1851 were still there in 1857. After 1873, many moved west on Cambridge Street. Ten shops that existed in 1857 were still operating in 1873, although mostly in new locations or in expanded form. By 1886, many of the early commercial property owners had purchased additional parcels to expand on Cambridge Street. Smaller retail areas also developed along Hurley and Charles streets beginning in the 1870s, but they never achieved the coherence of Cambridge Street (Fig. 337).

Two examples of the stability of Cambridge Street as a commercial thoroughfare are 414 and 425 Cambridge Street, which lie diagonally across the intersection of Fifth Street. The building at 414 Cambridge Street (1860) until recently preserved its early storefront (Fig. 338). The Blake family owned the building and operated a grocery store from 1864 through 1916 (Fig. 339). The building retained its identity as a grocery store at least until 1946, when a First National Store occupied the space. Similarly, 425 Cambridge Street (1824-25) has a long history of single ownership and use (Fig. 340). In 1867, the physician E. H. Weston purchased the house and, like many other businessmen at that time, added a storefront sometime before 1873. At first, Weston used the property as his office and living quarters, but in 1873 he moved his apothecary business into the storefront. An additional storefront



331. 305 Cambridge Street, 1877. Photograph 1964



332. 538-540 Cambridge Street, 1875-76. Photograph 1964



342. East Cambridge Garage, 665 Cambridge Street, 1927, S. S. Ersulag. Demolished 1974. Photograph 1969

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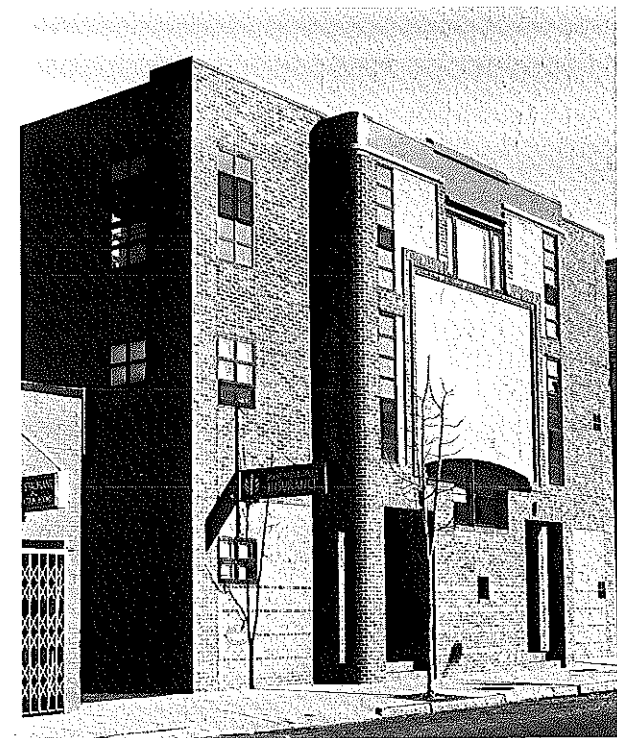
was added by 1893. The property has changed hands many times, but it remains in use as an apothecary.

By the turn of the century, Cambridge Street was filled with a mixture of stores, storefronts, tenements, and houses (Fig. 341). In the 1920s, some new buildings appeared, generally toward the western end of East Cambridge. Some of them had two stories, such as 648 Cambridge Street, and a few were one-story blocks, such as 657 Cambridge Street, which featured the cast stone trim that became popular throughout the city at that time. The most interesting commercial building of the decade was a fireproof garage at 665 Cambridge Street (1927) designed by S. S. Ersulag; it was demolished in 1974 by the Cambridge Housing Authority (Fig. 342).

At least two recent brick buildings were so undistinguished that they have been thoroughly redesigned and

expanded by other architects in the 1980s to increase their interest. In 1983, the one-story Hastings-Tapley insurance office (1969) at 271 Cambridge Street was completely transformed into a three-story office building (Fig. 343). Fred Koetter's Postmodern design, with its glass blocks, rounded brick corners, and large blank stucco panel in the center, fits somewhat uneasily into the streetscape but has given the street its most unusual commercial facade. It is to be expanded by the same architect in 1989.

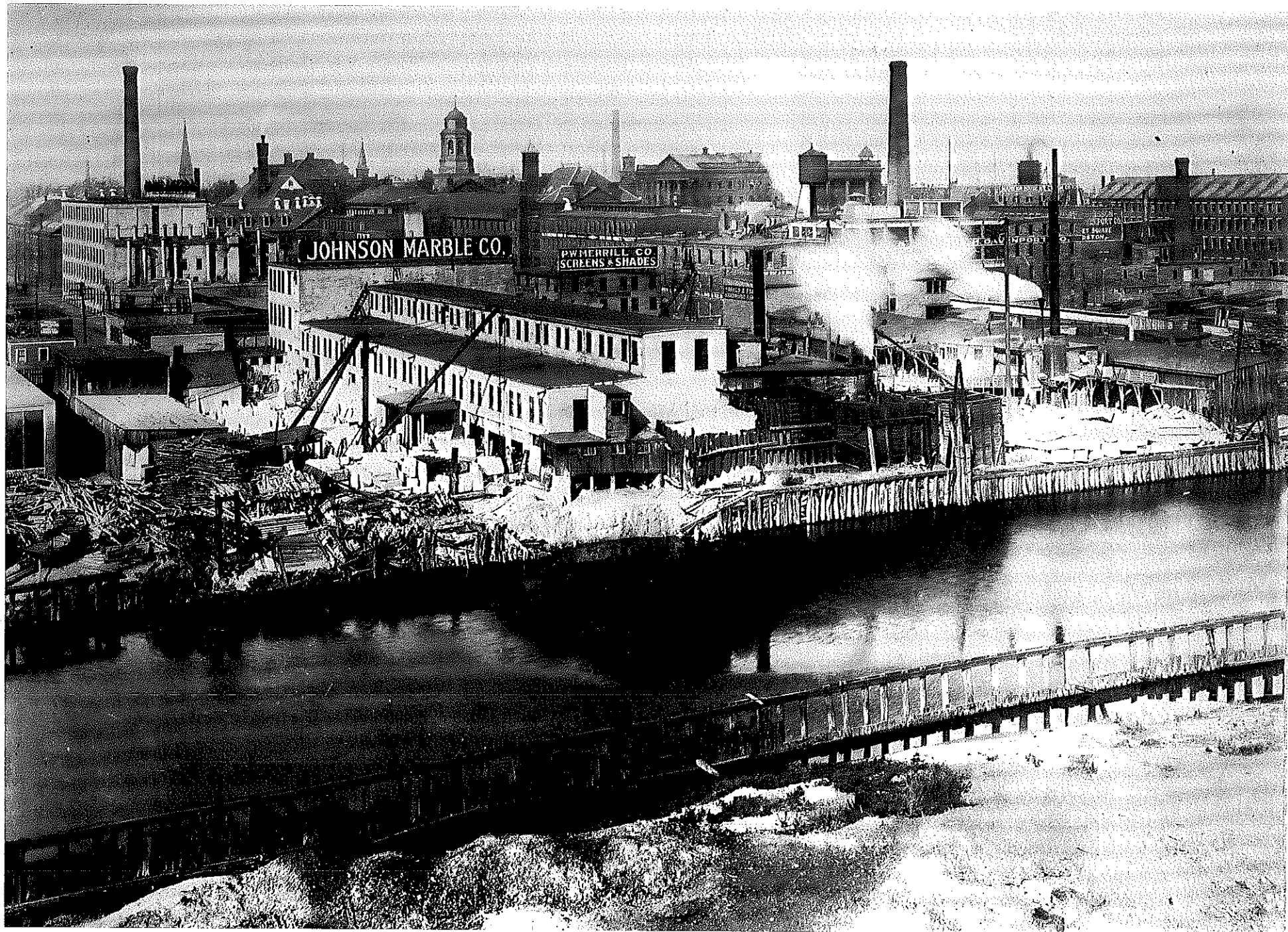
More recent is the remodeling and expansion of a two-story restaurant and office building at 501 Cambridge Street (1976). In 1986, the architectural firm of Hammer, Kiefer & Todd added a new third floor for its offices. The architects retained the yellow brick but changed the fenestration and introduced red brick accents and a pediment on the Cambridge Street side.



343. Hastings-Tapley Insurance Company, 271 Cambridge Street, 1983, Koetter Kim & Associates

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Today, Cambridge Street remains the commercial spine of East Cambridge and serves a neighborhood clientele with banks, bakeries, and ethnic groceries instead of the up-to-the-minute specialty stores that have invaded so many commercial areas of the city. Relatively little new construction has taken place in recent years, although a number of 19th-century buildings have been thoroughly remodeled, particularly on the ground floor. The most striking changes have resulted from the demolition of older buildings since the late 1960s, creating parking lots that disfigure the streetscape, especially at the corners of Cambridge and Third, Fourth, and Sixth streets. Gentrification and the construction of the Galleria mall will have unforeseeable consequences for the Cambridge Street business district.



344. Lechmere Canal, 1920. Background, from left to right: H. M. Sawyer & Son; Middlesex County Courthouse; Registry of Deeds; Irving & Casson-A. H. Davenport Company

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