

Building and Structure Documentation Collection

Cambridge Historical Commission
831 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Collection ID: CHC039

Provenance: Multiple Sources; see individual collections

Dates: 1966-2018

Extent: 11 flat boxes

Processing and finding aid by: Meta Partenheimer, October 2018

Access: Collection is available for research under the CHC rules of use

Collection Description:

This collection documents buildings and structures in Cambridge that were either demolished or significantly altered. The materials have been compiled often as a condition of approval by the Cambridge Planning Board for a proposed demolition and replacement project or renovation. For each building or structure, the corresponding box often includes an architectural description of the building or buildings, a narrative history, and archival photographs, negatives, photograph key(s), and/or electronic copies of the files and photographs.

Box Listing:

Abt Associates: 55 Wheeler Street

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 1966-2018

Provenance: Westbrook Properties, Epsilon Associates, Inc., August 27, 2018

Historical Note: The Abt Associates Office Complex, much of which is less than 50 years old as of 2018, is located 55 Wheeler Street, Cambridge, Mass. Abt Associates is “a consulting firm that specializes in combining social sciences, computer forecasting, operations analysis and systems engineering to address technological advances and social change.” (Historical Narrative, Westbrook Properties Documentation). Abt Associates was formed in Cambridge in 1965 by Dr. Clark C. Abt. The company’s Cambridge location is significant for its associations with an “iconic social sciences research and consulting firm that was forward-thinking for its time, providing child care, a restaurant and recreational facilities for employees.” (Memo, Liza Paden, June 28, 2017).

Boston Woven Hose Buildings

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 1999

Provenance: The Stubbins Associates, Inc., May 3, 1999

Historical Note: Boston Woven Hose and Rubber Company was founded by Theodore A. Dodge in 1884. Dodge began production by using shared space in the Curtis Davis Soap Company building on Portland Street. The business continued to expand and took over more space in the soap factory, finally expanding to its own buildings in present-day Kendall Square. By the 1880s Boston Woven Hose and Rubber Company had become one of the larger fire hose producers in the country. The company was incorporated in 1899 and soon branched out to produce a wide array of rubber products including belts, gaskets, and tires and became the largest rubber producer in the world. By the mid-twentieth century, the outdated buildings of Boston Woven Hose and Rubber Company impeded production and the company was acquired by American Biltrite Co in 1957. Operations ceased at this location in 1981 and the building has since been demolished.

Wolcott Gibbs Memorial Laboratory

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 2000

Provenance: Beth Shepard, Campus Planner, Harvard Planning and Real Estate, June 2, 2000

Historical Note: The Wolcott Gibbs Memorial Laboratory was constructed in 1913 and named to honor Wolcott Gibbs (Harvard L.L.D. 1888), Rumford Professor of Chemistry. It is a three-story building with a basement and sub-basement designed in the Neo-Georgian style. Architecturally, the building has a high degree of integrity of design. Close examination reveals textures and design elements derived from classical, Roman, medieval, late Gothic and Corinthian architecture. This academic building was originally designed for research in physical and inorganic chemistry. The facilities were engineered with early environmental control features. In addition to its architectural significance, the laboratory was the site of important contributions to the science of chemistry. Gibbs Laboratory scientists made consequential discoveries in medicine, nuclear, physical, and organic chemistry. (Research by historians Robert C. Stewart and Martin Forsberg of Historical Technologies). The building has since been demolished.

Lechmere Viaduct

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 2015

Provenance: Andrew D. Brennan, Director of Energy and Environment, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Rail & Transit Division, January 5, 2015

Historical Note: Construction of the Lechmere Viaduct began in 1907 and ended with its opening in 1912. The Lechmere Viaduct is a concrete arch bridge that connects East Cambridge with the West End Neighborhood in Boston. At a total length of 1700 feet, the viaduct was constructed by George A. Kimball (Chief Engineer of Elevated & Subway Construction, Boston Elevated Railway), Holbrook, Cabot & Rollins Corp. of Boston (contractor), and Strauss Bascul Bridge Co. of Chicago, Illinois, to transport rail cars of the MBTA's Green Line over the Charles River. The viaduct is still employed by the "E" brand of the MBTA Green Line.

Parsons Building – Mount Auburn Hospital: 330 Mount Auburn Street

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 2006

Provenance: Brona Simon, Acting Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission

Historical Note: Mount Auburn Hospital was founded in 1886 as the first hospital in Cambridge. The Parsons Building was the first building erected at the hospital and was named for the hospital's founder, Civil War Nurse Emily Elizabeth Parsons. The building has since been demolished.

Harvard University – Dunbar Laboratory and Steam Shed

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 2001

Provenance: Harvard Planning and Real Estate, April 2001

Historical Note: Constructed in 1918, the Dunbar Laboratory originally served as a cryogenic laboratory for engineering research. Beginning in the late 1950s, the building housed laboratories devoted to research activities in nuclear medicine. Dunbar Laboratory had two separate sections. The easterly portion was an unornamented, flat roofed two-story building built of concrete block. Windows were steel framed with six over three lights separated by a steel mullion and set on a stone sill. The westerly segment was a one-story wood frame structure with a pitched roof. The front and rear facades have wood framed windows with four uniformly sized lights placed two over two. It was associated with a heating plant for a U.S. Navy Drill Hall that served a communications detachment during the First World War. The steam shed, constructed from 1917-1918, originally housed a heating plant for a drill hall built for the U.S. Navy. The Naval detachment operated a radio communications station at Harvard during World War I. It was a one-story wood frame building with an open second story. The building has clapboard siding applied horizontally and overlapped. It has three sections, all of which have pitched roofs. King post trusses carried the roof in the two main sections of the building. The rear of the building, facing Hammond Street, had an unused and sealed off double door comprised of two single leaves hung in the same doorframe. This may have served to provide access to fill a coal bunker located within the building. The open two-story portion of the building probably housed a boiler for the drill hall heating system. There was a smaller windowless, one story structure attached to the steam shed on the south face. The building housed an unused lathe and arbor press. It also had pip cutting and threading equipment which was used by maintenance personnel. (Research by historians Robert C. Stewart and Martin Forsberg of Historical Technologies). These buildings have since been demolished.

Fogg Museum (Harvard Art Museum Restoration and Expansion Project): 32 Quincy Street

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 2009

Provenance: Brona Simon, Executive Director, State Historic Preservation Officer, Massachusetts Historical Commission, December 22, 2009

Historical Note: From History and the Three Museums:

<https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/about/history-and-the-three-museums>

“The Harvard Art Museums are comprised of three separate museums—the Fogg Museum, Busch-Reisinger Museum, and Arthur M. Sackler Museum—each with a different history, collection, guiding philosophy, and identity.

Fogg Museum

The Fogg Museum opened in 1895 on the northern edge of Harvard Yard in a modest Beaux-Arts building designed by Richard Morris Hunt, twenty-one years after the President and Fellows of Harvard College appointed Charles Eliot Norton the first professor of art history in America. It was made possible when, in 1891, Mrs. Elizabeth Fogg gave a gift in memory of her husband to build “an Art Museum to be called and known as the William Hayes Fogg Museum of Harvard College.” In 1927, the Fogg Museum moved to its home at 32 Quincy Street.

Designed by architects Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch, and Abbott of Boston, the joint art museum and teaching facility was the first purpose-built structure for the specialized training of art scholars, conservators, and museum professionals in North America. With an early collection that consisted largely of plaster casts and photographs, the Fogg Museum is now renowned for its holdings of Western paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, photographs, prints, and drawings dating from the Middle Ages to the present.

Busch-Reisinger Museum

The Busch-Reisinger Museum was founded in 1901 as the Germanic Museum. Unique among North American museums, the Busch-Reisinger is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries. In 1921 the Germanic Museum moved to Adolphus Busch Hall, built partly with funds from Adolphus Busch’s son-in-law, Hugo Reisinger, and in 1950 it was renamed the Busch-Reisinger Museum. The museum moved again in 1991, this time to Werner Otto Hall at 32 Quincy Street, designed by Gwathmey Siegel & Associates. Adolphus Busch Hall continues to house the founding collection of plaster casts of medieval art and is the venue for concerts on its world-renowned Flentrop pipe organ, while the Busch-Reisinger Museum’s holdings include significant works of Austrian Secession art, German expressionism, 1920s abstraction, and materials related to the Bauhaus. Other strengths include late-medieval sculpture and eighteenth-century art. The museum also holds noteworthy postwar and contemporary art from German-speaking Europe.

Arthur M. Sackler Museum

In 1912, Langdon Warner taught the first courses in Asian art at Harvard, and the first at any American university. By 1977, Harvard’s collections of Asian, ancient, and Islamic and later Indian art had grown sufficiently in size and importance to require a larger space for their display and study. With the generosity of Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, a leading psychiatrist, entrepreneur, art collector, and philanthropist, the Harvard Art Museums founded a museum dedicated to works from Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. The Arthur M. Sackler Museum, a new museum building at 485 Broadway designed by James Stirling, opened in 1985. This structure remains the home of the History of Art and Architecture Department and the Media Slide Library.

Renovation and Expansion

The Harvard Art Museums' recent renovation and expansion builds on the legacies of these three museums and unites their remarkable collections under one roof for the first time. Renzo Piano Building Workshop's responsive design preserved the Fogg Museum's landmark 1927 facility, while transforming the space to accommodate twenty-first-century needs.

Following a six-year building project, the museums now feature 40 percent more gallery space, an expanded Art Study Center, conservation labs, and classrooms, and a striking new glass roof that bridges the facility's historic and contemporary architecture.

In line with Harvard's commitment to sustainability, the museums' renovation and expansion achieved LEED Gold certification for incorporating a wide range of green building technologies including, energy efficient LED bulbs and an innovative water conservation system. The new Harvard Art Museums' building is more functional, accessible, spacious, and above all, more transparent. The three constituent museums retain their distinct identities in this new facility, yet their close proximity provides exciting opportunities to experience works of art in a broader context."

American Twine Building: 222 Third Street

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 1982-2007

Provenance: Niles Sutphin, Sutphin Architects, February 6, 2007

Historical Note: From Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) building form: "In 1844, while most fish nets were handmade hemp imports from England, the American Net & Twine Company became the first American firm to manufacture cotton twine and netting. This three story brick factory was built in 1875 expressly for the rapidly expanding firms needs. The building features wide segmental arched windows set within segmental arched arcades and a jerkinhead gable roof pierced by broad gabled dormers. A central projecting pedimented tower on the southern facade rises four stories in height and has segmental arched opening set within flat arched arcades. Between 1886 and 1916, two additions were made to the west and south forming in an "L" shape. They continue the fenestration and detailing of the first building, with rough cut granite sills and a flat roof." Renovation and conversion of the building into an office park was completed in 1984

197 Coolidge Hill

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 2005

Provenance: Unknown

Historical Note: This residence was originally designed by architect Howard T. Fisher, founder of General Houses, Inc. in 1935 for owners William B. and Rosemond Forbes Bowers. The structure was the first modern house in Cambridge and exhibited flat roofs, corner windows, and metal deck railings. General Houses was a company that specialized in creating low-cost prefabricated housing with consisting of interchangeable panels. The

panels could be configured in a number of ways to suit the homeowner. This house was demolished in 2006 and a new one built in its place.

28 Osborn Street

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 2001

Provenance: Tsoi/Kobus Associates, Inc., June 2001

Historical Note: The buildings at 28 Osborn Street in Cambridge make up a relatively intact nineteenth century manufacturing complex. Most recently they were occupied by research laboratories, offices and archives of the Polaroid Corporation. They have been the site of historic manufacturing and technological developments dating back to the late 19th century. The Davenport Car Works, a firm that pioneered the manufacture of omnibuses and railroad passenger cars, operated here until 1857. Allen and Endicott operated a general machine shop and boiler works here until 1876 when they reorganized as a property management firm and rented space to a number of small firms. These included the Barbour, Stockwell foundry, Standard Action Company, Union Switch & Signal, Gale Lumber Company and others. J.J. Walworth & Co. occupied the original (1815) northernmost “headhouse” building, razed and rebuilt in 1882 as a heavy industrial building. The original building was the receiving location of the first long distance telephone call from Alexander Graham Bell to his assistant Mr. Watson on October 9, 1876. In 1907, Isaac Kaplan rented a small portion of the complex and began to make furniture. The Kaplan firm grew and by 1927 purchased the entire property. Kaplan produced high-quality reproduction Federal-style furniture into the 1950s. The easternmost building, originally park of the Davenport factory, housed the research laboratory of Dr. Edwin H. Land and was the site where he developed “polarizing plastic material” in 1936. Edwin Land rented space in the headhouse building in 1942 for a laboratory. Developments coming out of this site included instant photography, polarizing film and numerous commercial and military products. Polaroid occupied the entire block by 1960 and manufactured film and cameras here. By 1990 Polaroid’s manufacturing was relocated and research labs occupied the site. Polaroid sold the entire site to Massachusetts Institution of Technology in 1998. The buildings show an interesting mix of joisted and slow-burning mill floor construction as well as a variety of vernacular brickwork and post and beam construction. (Research by historian Robert C. Stewart of Historical Technologies)

Irving & Casson – A.H. Davenport Company Building: 26-28 Otis Street

Extent: 1 box

Dates: 1985-2011

Provenance: Niles Sutphin, Sutphin Architects, April 29, 2011

Historical Note: Architectural significance taken from page 10 of “Historical Report for the Irving & Casson – A.H. Davenport Factory Block, East Cambridge, MA” prepared by Margo B. Webber: “The Irving & Casson Company block is significant both for its role in the historical development of East Cambridge as a furniture-manufacturing center and also for its architectural quality and integrity as a late 19th/early 20th century factory complex. As such, each building within the block contributes to the overall complex as a whole, visually as well as historically.”

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