

Carriage Making

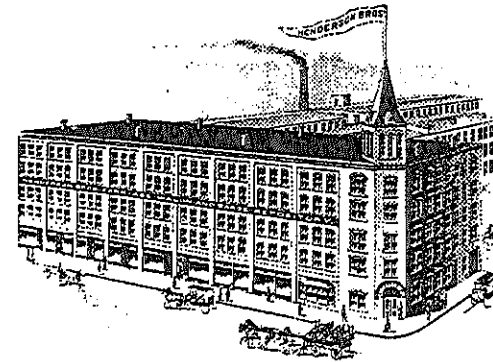
In rural New England, wagons and carriages were built in almost every village large enough to support a blacksmith and a wheelwright. North Cambridge, which grew up along a major highway linking the towns of Middlesex County with Boston, once had many such craftsmen.

In the mid-19th century, a few craftsmen enlarged their operations with great success. In 1848, Walter Allen built a sizable carriage shop on Massachusetts Avenue at the corner of the street later named for him. Allen was succeeded in 1863 by Francis Ivers, who continued the business until the First World War, when the building was taken over by an automobile dealer.

Members of the Henderson family were the busiest carriage builders in North Cambridge. Robert Henderson started a blacksmith shop on Massachusetts Avenue near Day

Street in 1841, and in 1862 he and his sons began building carriages in an old shed near Hadley Street. In 1869, the Hendersons divided their enterprise. Robert and his son George returned to their original site; son James built a factory near Cameron Avenue; and Robert Jr. and John, calling themselves the Henderson Brothers, built the largest and most successful factory at the Hadley Street location.

The Henderson brothers erected woodworking and blacksmith shops at the back of the lot and a large "repository" facing Massachusetts Avenue. When the latter burned down in 1892, the Hendersons put up an even larger building to provide space for the seasonal storage of carriages and sleighs.

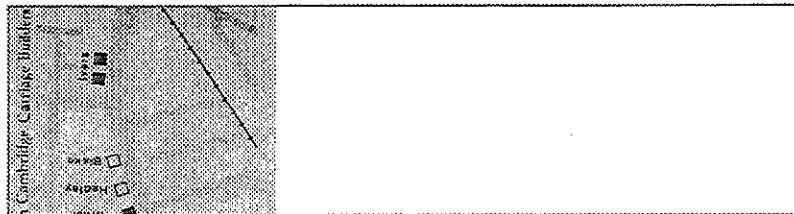


Henderson's Carriage Repository, which is still the largest building in North Cambridge, was used for the seasonal storage of carriages and sleighs. The manufacturing buildings in the rear were razed long before the repository was restored in 1986.

None of the North Cambridge carriage builders survived for long in the automobile age. Henderson Brothers began making truck bodies in the 1920s, but the firm never regained its earlier success. By 1930 the factory had ceased production. The repository housed an automobile dealership until it was renovated for stores and offices in 1986; it is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Sources:

- Cambridge Historical Commission. *Report Five: Northwest Cambridge, 1977* (map).
- Arthur Gilman, *The Cambridge of Eighteen Hundred and Ninety-Six*. Cambridge, 1896 (woodcut).
- Edward W. Hanson, "North Cambridge's Henderson Block." *The Bay State Historical League Bulletin*, winter 1983-84.



Carriage makers, blacksmiths, and wheelwrights settled along heavily-trafficked North (now Massachusetts) Avenue, which was the main highway leading northwest from Boston until the mid 20th century.

