

## SPRING 2016

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## The Cambridge Historian

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## THE ENDURING THREE-DECKER

BY MICHAEL KENNEY

On a spring day some 20 years ago, I was standing in front of our house, a double three-decker on Pleasant Street. A young man walking by with two youngsters in tow spotted me and asked if I lived in it.

When I said that I did, he told me that he had grown up there. How many children live here now?, he asked. None, I told him. He then ticked off, family by family, the 16 children who had lived in the building back then—five of them in his family, which had lived in the same second-floor apartment where my wife and I were now living.

The young man's children grew restless, and they had to move along, but I was left with an insight into not-so-long-ago Cambridge and the purpose for which our "six-pack," as double three-deckers are sometimes tagged, had been built, just over a century ago.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



As it is today, Speridakis Terrace (formerly Pearl Terrace) was lined with 3-deckers in this photo from 1948.

Photo credit: Ed Carney photo; Cambridge Historical Commission



The London, 129 Magazine Street

Photo credit: Bruce Irving

## THE CHS'S ANNUAL MEETING

Wednesday, March 9, 2016 | First Parish in Cambridge, Harvard Square

BY ROSEMARY PREVITE & SHEREE BROWN

March 9, warm and springlike, was a perfect evening for some 120 attendees of the Society's 111th Annual Meeting, held at First Parish Church. President Tod Beaty welcomed guests and spoke about the Society's growth and professionalism over the past couple of years. He thanked the group for their support as the organization progresses towards a stronger culture of philanthropy to support the Society's goals. Secretary Frank Kramer proposed the slate of Officers, all of whom were unanimously approved:

President, Tod Beaty  
Vice Presidents, Elizabeth Adams Lasser and Charlie Allen  
Treasurer, Greg Bowe  
Curator, Heli Meltsner  
Editor, Bruce Irving  
Secretary, Frank Kramer



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# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



*Dear Members and Supporters,*

The Cambridge Historical Society strives to share the stories of our city and to make Cambridge curious. Back in February, we asked our members and friends to share their opinions on how we are meeting our goals. Here are some of the statements we sought reactions to:

*"The Cambridge Historical Society is relevant to our community."*

*"The Cambridge Historical Society offers fun and lively event."*

*"The Cambridge Historical Society is for someone like me."*

I want to share with you some of our results. Overall, we got pretty good marks, a testament to my predecessors and colleagues for all their hard work. When presented with **"The Society has an appealing image,"** most respondents agreed (49%) or strongly agreed (19%). Many also agreed (46%) or strongly agreed (28%) that the Society **"is for someone like me."**

We also received constructive feedback. When asked "Who does the Society serve?" respondents gave answers ranging from "members" and "history buffs" to "rich people" and "mostly white families whose line runs back generations." These are important perspectives to keep in mind as we move forward with our programming.

### Great ideas for how we can increase our relevancy to our audiences included:

*"More engagement with youth/  
college students"*

*"Relating to more periods of the  
history of Cambridge and more  
parts of the city"*

*"Holding events in places other  
than West Cambridge, creating  
programs on topics crucial to  
Cambridge residents"*

*"Much, much, much greater  
focus on the recent history of  
the city and the current, diverse  
communities that are part of it"*

In 2014, the Society's governing Council approved a new strategic plan, which focuses on providing quality public history to all of Cambridge. 2016 is our first year really tackling that mission. Our goal of being relevant to our members and friends by addressing contemporary issues with a historical perspective is underway, and I hope you are taking part in our efforts.

Did you miss the opportunity to complete the survey? We still welcome your thoughts! Please reach out to me via email at [mvandamme@cambridgehistory.org](mailto:mvandamme@cambridgehistory.org) to share your views.

We intend to run this survey often in the future, to monitor our changes and subsequent impact. Thank you for being a part of our work and for helping us serve you better.

All the best,

Marieke Van Damme

# 2015 HOLIDAY PARTY

BY ROSEMARY PREVITE

The Cambridge Historical Society extended a warm welcome to nearly 150 members and friends at its annual holiday party, which was held on December 8 at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. It was a festive and celebratory evening, as guests shared in applauding the Society's successes of 2015—its 110th year. Attendees enjoyed a sumptuous buffet prepared by Jules Catering, and the evening's generous sponsors included Liz Adams-Lasser, Luise Erdmann, Fresh Pond Market, Iggy's, Sevan Bakery, Trader Joe's, and Whole Foods.

The party was also an opportunity to welcome our new Executive Director, Marieke Van Damme, who began work in June 2015. CHS council members in attendance included President Tod Beaty, Vice President Liz Adams, Vice President Charlie Allen, Editor Bruce Irving, Secretary Frank Kramer, Treasurer



CHS Executive Directors, past and present: (from left) Lewis Bushnell, Marieke Van Damme, Karen Davis, and Renny Little

Andy Leighton, Curator Heli Meltsner, and Councilors Greg Bowe, George Carlisle, and Jan Ferrara.

*Many thanks to our guests and supporters for making this year's holiday party a great success!*

## THE CHS'S ANNUAL MEETING (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

The new nominees to the Council—Doug Hanna, Pamela Brown, and Sean Hope—were warmly welcomed and also unanimously approved. Special thanks were given to Rolf Goetze for his service on the Council, and to Andy Leighton for his service as Treasurer.

The Officers' reports included Kramer's report on the new council members; Andy Leighton, presenting the treasurer's report for 2015; curator Heli Meltsner, reporting on research queries, visits to the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, and acquisitions over the past year; and editor Bruce Irving's news about the upcoming spring edition of *The Cambridge Historian*, the theme of which is **housing**.

Executive director Marieke Van Damme spoke of her first nine months at the helm, with a warm thank you to all who have guided and supported her. She described her vision for the future: "Going forward, the Society will focus on events that we as a city are facing and offer a historical perspective. ...the Society intends to explore how we got here, so that we can understand the present and make decisions for the future." Several new programs that will address the question "Are we home?" include History Cafés (informal salons), the History Fellows, a fall symposium (discussions on the past, present, and future of affordable housing), and other events throughout the year.

Marieke also introduced the four History Fellows for 2016: Rayshauna Gray, Barbara Halliday, Donna Karl, and Kari Kuelzer, each of whom will be exploring a research question related to this year's housing theme.

To address the question "How Has Cambridge Housed Its Poorest?", Heli Meltsner and Sam Greenberg, co-director of Harvard Square's Y2Y Shelter, treated attendees to a



Photo Credit: Anne Abbruzzese

## Attendees at the Annual Meeting, The First Parish, Harvard Square

fascinating conversation. Meltsner discussed Cambridge's six municipally funded poorhouses, which in the 19th century housed the aged, widows, orphans, and people with disabilities. Although poorhouses have been gradually replaced by other social service agencies, many of the same at-risk populations continue to face the challenge of adequate housing today.

Located in a newly renovated space on the lower level of the First Parish church, Y2Y is one of the few shelters for the care of young people (aged 18 to 24), and it is staffed by student volunteers. While abuse, neglect, and family issues remain factors in youth poverty and homelessness, Y2Y provides a shift in thinking about the problem. Greenberg referred to the residents as "guests" (vs. the poorhouse "inmate") and revealed that the recently opened facility is a place where young people can find community, learn leadership skills, feel safe, self-advocate, and simply engage in conversations and board games. As a short-term shelter, Y2Y is not a "home" in the traditional sense of the word, but it does strive to develop skill-building so that guests can actively seek out homes for themselves in the future.



# KEEPING OUR TREES HEALTHY

BY ANNETTE LAMOND, FOR THE CAMBRIDGE PLANT & GARDEN CLUB

Last spring, the Cambridge Plant & Garden Club became concerned about the CHS's ancient horse chestnut. The once grand tree—though reduced in scale—was struggling. It still had a big personality, recalling an earlier time when chestnut trees anchored the front gardens of many Brattle Street estates, so a call went out to Hartney Greymont arborist David Anderson.

Dave ordered two summer subsurface fertilization treatments, as well as a winter pruning. The crew also pruned the linden at the south corner of the property and the Norway maple by the garage. All the work was done pro bono. Thanks to Hartney Greymont, the Society's trees are in very good shape. We are grateful, and look forward to enjoying their well-pruned beauty as they leaf out this spring.

## Historical note on the CP&GC

Soon after receiving the Hooper-Lee-Nichols house in 1957, the Society reached out to the Cambridge Plant Club and Cambridge Garden Club for help with the garden. The Garden



Photo Credit: Annette LaMond

## Chestnut tree pruning at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House on January 26, 2016

Club responded with a plan, plant material, and volunteers. Though the CHS garden has evolved since the early 1960s, the structure established by the club remains, as does the commitment of today's Cambridge Plant & Garden Club to the Society's landscape.

The club's first work day of the spring is scheduled for April 27. Volunteers wanted! [info@cambridgeplantandgardenclub.org](mailto:info@cambridgeplantandgardenclub.org).

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## THE ENDURING THREE-DECKER (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

There were approximately 1,400 three-deckers built in Cambridge between 1873 and 1930; among the earliest is the handsome one at 15 Upland Road, built in 1875. Curiously enough, there's little scholarly agreement on the how and why of three-deckers. "It all happened in a swirl of mystery in the post-Civil War period," writes architectural historian Arthur Krim. "Builders were beginning to fool around with two- and three-story buildings—appearing first in Boston, Worcester, and Fall River—but were stalled by the [financial] Panic of 1873. By the early 1880s they started going again, and the form we know now took hold." And, says Charles Sullivan, executive director of the Cambridge Historical Commission, three-deckers "did not appear until municipal utilities could provide water and sewage, and until building technology evolved to permit construction of flat roofs."

One intriguing origin theory was suggested by Christopher Lenney in his 2008 study "Landmaking," which finds "more than a casual correlation" between three-deckers and French-Canadian immigrants: "They were built by them and lived in by them; they turn up with surprising regularity in the mill towns of both New England and Quebec."

As for the "why" question, Krim suggested in a 1975 paper that they were built in response to an increasing demand by working-class families. The style took middle-class living standards—cast-iron stove, piped water, central heating—"and stacked the family units on top of one another using the familiar wood building technology."

A map published by the Historical Commission in 1988 shows solid rows of three-deckers along side streets off Huron Avenue and on Camp and Madison streets. There are 39 on the four short blocks of Hurley Street in East Cambridge, most built in the 1880s and '90s. Cambridge Terrace in North Cambridge is almost entirely three-deckers, built in 1908–09, and Speridakis Terrace in Cambridgeport sports a dozen, put up between 1905 and 1909.

As the demand for land and housing increased with a rising population, some developers turned to building spacious, elaborately decorated and appointed three-deckers to coax middle-class owners out of their single-family homes and into denser living. With names like the London (at 129 Magazine Street) and the Lowell (at 33 Lexington Avenue), these represented a new kind of upscale city living, while the vacated single-family homes (and the lots they stood on) opened up a chance to build more multi-unit dwellings in the city.

Construction of three-deckers tailed off in the first decades of the 20th century, as opposition to their construction grew among housing reformers like the Cambridge Anti-Tuberculosis Association and the Municipal Art Society, who cited unhealthy living conditions. Following the lead of the State Legislature, the City Council in 1915 sought to ban their construction.

Eventually, in 1922, the council adopted an ordinance allowing their construction with some restrictions, specifying construction details, fire safety accommodations,

CONTINUED ON OPPOSITE PAGE



# HOW NEW COMMUNITIES SERVICES HELPS

BY ALICE MCCARTER, MSW, DIRECTOR, NEW COMMUNITIES SERVICES

*A former computer industry worker—unemployed and unable to find work—submitted his application to Norfolk Street Congregate Housing in Cambridge, where the minimum rent was set at \$50 until he could access Social Security retirement funds. At Norfolk, the social service coordinator helped him apply for general assistance. This resident lived at Norfolk Street for 20 years.*

*Because of substance abuse and mental illness, a retired school-teacher found herself in a homeless shelter. After moving to a halfway house, she was accepted at Norfolk Street and attended an adult day health program that provided nursing and rehab care, social services, meals, transportation, therapeutic activities, and companionship. She developed a relationship with the social service coordinator and received medical care, as well as in-home services, such as a homemaker to assist with laundry, grocery shopping, and light housekeeping. After 15 years, she moved into a fully equipped, one-bedroom unit in a Cambridge Housing Authority elder housing building.*

These are just two examples of people who have benefited from New Communities Services, established in 1973 by Pamela Shea as a 501(c)3 corporation. Ms. Shea's goal was to provide options for elders in need of "a little bit of help" to remain in their community. Ms. Shea was the president of New Communities until 2004.

New Communities Services' mission is "to maintain adults in their communities by providing high-quality adult day health services and dignified supportive housing to adults whose special needs place them at high risk of living in an institutional setting." My 26 years of experience can attest that providing housing for a homeless (or near homeless) person is an exhilarating, gratifying experience.

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## THE ENDURING THREE-DECKER (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4)

and the need for "the written consent of 75 percent of the owners... within 200 feet of the center of the lot on which the dwelling is proposed to be erected." As the *Cambridge Chronicle* reported, one city councilor said that "there were 100 people in North Cambridge who wanted to erect homes. The ordinance would permit three-deckers where they were wanted and prevent them where they were not welcome."

Despite the ordinance, by the late 1920s barely a dozen three-deckers went up in a given year, far from the 80-to-90 annual rate of the late 1800s. Only two were built in 1930.

Finally, while the end of rent control in 1994 contributed to the replacement of working-class families by young

I came to New Communities Services in 1989 as the fiscal director, became social service coordinator in 1998, and then took on the management of Norfolk Street Congregate Housing through a contract with the Cambridge Housing Authority.

Norfolk Street, which until its 1975 residential conversion was St. Mary's Convent, serves up to 40 residents—elders 60 years of age and older and disabled adults, who may be frail, disabled, or have a history of homelessness. We currently house 27 men and 13 women. Nine to twelve residents live on each floor and share a common kitchen and three shower rooms.

The idea of congregate housing is to provide shelter to residents who share some aspect of the housing. In addition, a social service coordinator assists residents in maintaining their independence. The key to congregate housing is the concept of the "just right" combination of assistance to maintain or even enhance each resident's independence. Funding for the social service coordination component of congregate housing comes from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Office of Elder Affairs, and the city's housing authority provides rental assistance. In general the cost to a resident is a third of his or her annual income.

Besides providing housing, New Communities operates Windsor House Adult Day Health programs in Cambridge. These vital services can make the difference between aging in place and aging in a nursing home.

professionals, it also led to the reinvestment in buildings by their owners. There are even versions going up today, such as a handsome one designed by Cambridge's Smart Architecture at 156–158 Cushing Street. Condominiumized, a two-bed, one-bath unit in a three-decker can easily fetch a half-million dollars these days, something that would surely set the original dwellers' heads spinning.

Along with prices, demographics have shifted. A housing form that once sheltered large families with aspirations to a better way of life is now far more likely to be home to a young couple working in bio-tech. It seems like the three-decker lives on, ready to house whoever might be coming to town.



# IMPRESSIONS OF THE “5 SENSES/5 CENTURIES” TOUR OF THE HOOPER-LEE-NICHOLS HOUSE

BY ROSEMARY PREVITE, AND JUSTIN AND HANS-PETER BIEMANN

Since last fall, visitors to the Hooper-Lee-Nichols house, headquarters of the Cambridge Historical Society, have enjoyed several live performances, thanks to the talents of Daniel Berger-Jones of Cambridge Historical Tours. With Daniel's expert guidance, visitors have been able to see, smell, touch, and “hear” the house—the second-oldest building in Cambridge—over the 17th to 21st centuries. In addition, they can taste some of the treats unique to Cambridge, such as Fig Newtons, Necco Wafers, and Squirrel Nut Zippers. Local father-and-son residents Hans-Peter and Justin Biemann spoke about their experience on a recent tour.\*

## How long have you lived in Cambridge?

**H-P:** I've lived here since birth in 1960, except for university times elsewhere. **Justin:** I have lived in Cambridge for my whole life of 13 years.

## What did you learn that you never knew before?

**Justin:** When the house was first built, it had only two rooms. I would not have thought that was possible if I had not heard it from an expert. I had heard of the Washington Elm, but I had no idea where it was. I also did not know that it [a slice of the tree] was so expensive, and that every president got a piece. There is also a big fireplace because the house had no [central] heating or insulation.

**H-P:** I was surprised about how the house grew over time from such a small original footprint. Another surprise was that the Tory owner Joseph Lee, who fled during the Revolution, returned to live in the home after the war and continued to participate in the community. Numerous Cambridge historic facts were fun to hear. Who would have guessed that the origin of the first telephone includes the efforts of an inventor—Alexander Graham Bell—to help his student, Mabel Hubbard, who lost her hearing at age five?

There were so many cycles of industrial development, most of which happened in late-blooming East Cambridge. And the near miss of receiving NASA's manned space flight center was explained during the tour—in which case the famous words would have been, “Cambridge, we have a problem.”

## Would you have liked to live in the Hooper-Lee-Nichols house? If so, when?

**Justin:** If I could, I would live in the house now because of its current situation, since the house is so famous.

**H-P:** The mid-1800s must have been a wonderful time to live there. Tranquil woods surrounding the area, and down

to the marshy shore of the Charles River. Brattle Street was probably still gravel, as it was in the 1830s. The neighborhood and Cambridge must have been blossoming in many ways... Longfellow and his colleagues afoot. Lifestyles were more comfortable than a century earlier, when, as the tour informed us, bathing and laundry were scant.

## How did the tour relate to your own everyday life?

**Justin:** In my seventh-grade class we are studying colonial America. That made the tour so interesting, because I knew some of the parts about the 17th and 18th centuries, but not all, and this broadened my range of knowledge.

**H-P:** The Cambridge places and events related to many of my life experiences. I lived for several years on Tory Row and wrote a report during 7th grade at Shady Hill on a house there (the Ruggles-Fayerweather House). Additionally, my youngest years were spent in East Cambridge amongst the candy factories, and I worked in the Woven Hose factory building in the 1990s–2000s.

## The tour used all five senses to bring history to life.

### Which sense made an impression on you?

**J:** I liked when the tour used smell because you could feel like you were there. We could smell what the fireplace would have smelled like in the 1600s. We also got to hear some noises that sounded exactly like what you would hear if you opened the window to Brattle Street during that time.

## What aspect of life in the past struck you as the most difficult?

**J:** I think the most difficult aspect of life in the past was getting along with others, because there were a lot of disunities and enemies between countries about 200 or 250 years ago. One of those bad relationships was between England and the colonies. Another problem was that you had to drink a lot of rum because clean water was hard to find. Because of that, many people were walking around drunk.

## Which part sounded like it would have been better than the present?

**H-P:** The relative simplicity of civilization and of peoples' realms as the young nation was reared seem refreshing compared to life with 21st century bandwidth torrents and spam e-mails!

*\*Justin's entire seventh-grade class from Shady Hill returned for a performance on March 1. Want to bring a group for a “5 Senses/5Centuries” tour? Call or email us for details!*

# THE CHS'S NEW COUNCILORS



**Doug Hanna**, president of S&H Construction, Inc., in Cambridge, graduated from the Cambridge High & Latin School (now CRLS) and studied anthropology and political science at UMass Boston. He worked in construction from the age of 18, when he was employed by a masonry restoration and waterproofing company in Boston. In the early 1970s he apprenticed in California as a carpenter while continuing his education at Palomar College. He reconnected with his Cambridge friend Alex Slive in 1978 and created S (Slive) & H (Hanna) Construction. As a general contractor, Doug has interacted for many years with the Cambridge Historical Commission and serves on the board of the Cambridge Housing Assistance Fund. He is a history buff and has traveled in Europe, India, and China.



**Pamela Baldwin**, a lapsed art historian and committed housing advocate, Pamela has had a lifelong interest in the history of objects, places, and materials. She enjoys old maps and studies growth, decline, sprawl, gentrification, revitalization, and neighborhood change. She is the deputy director of the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies and serves on advisory boards for community development issues, including CHAPA's Policy Leadership Council. A resident of Arlington, she is a board member at the Arlington Housing Corporation and the Housing Production Plan Advisory Committee. Pamela attended Wellesley College, holds a M.A. and Ph.D. in art history from Bryn Mawr College, and taught at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.



**Sean D. Hope**, as founder of Hope Legal Law Offices in Cambridge, Sean practices law in land use and zoning, municipal licensing, real property, and conveyancing and food and beverage licensing. While studying at the New England School of Law, he served on Cambridge's zoning board. A licensed real estate broker and principal at Hope Homes Realty, he is on the development team (funded by the state's Department of Housing and Community Development) to build affordable housing in Kendall Square. A third-generation Cantabrigian, he received his B.A. from Loyola University and interned at the New Orleans Jobs Initiative for individuals living in public housing. Through his work with the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House and the Area 4 for Peace Group, Hope is attuned to the needs of residents and small businesses of Area 4.

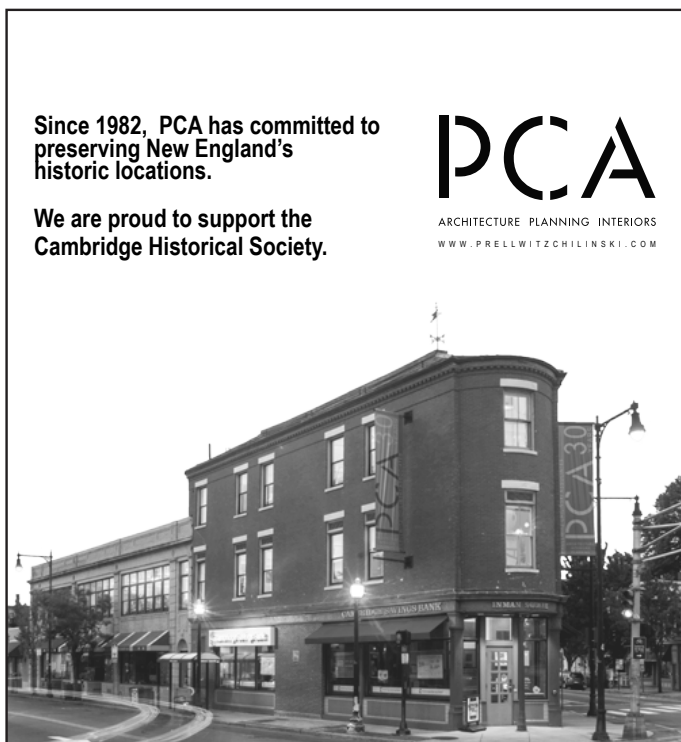
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## GEORGE HANFORD 1920–2016

George Hyde Hanford died at age 95 on April 3 following a very brief illness. He graduated from the Fessenden School, Phillips Exeter Academy, Harvard College, and Harvard Business School. Mr. Hanford served with the U.S. Navy during World War II. He was an assistant dean at Harvard Business School; the treasurer and a math teacher at the North Shore Country Day School in Winnetka, Illinois; and President of The College Board in New York City, where he served for 32 years.

Having grown up in Cambridge and returned there following retirement, Mr. Hanford was an active member of the Cambridge Historical Society, including serving as its president. His beloved wife of 62 years, Elaine Halstead Hanford, with whom he travelled the world, died in 2004. He had a brief second marriage to Yvonne Wharton, who predeceased him.

Mr. Hanford is survived by his daughters Anne Hanford of Belmont and the Rev. Mary Lee Wile of Brunswick, Maine, and by four grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.





# A HARDWORKING PATCH OF DIRT

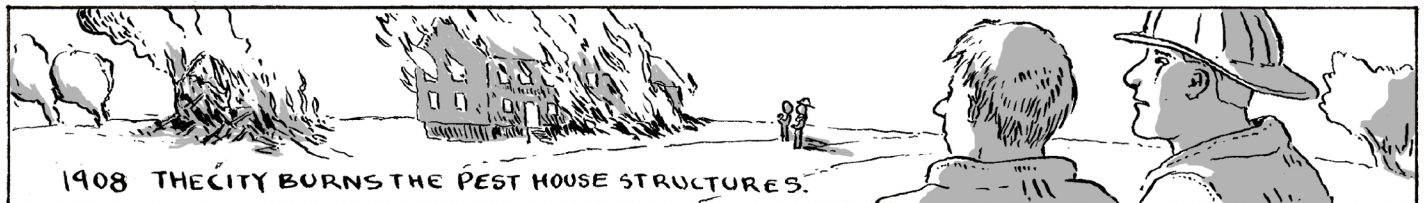
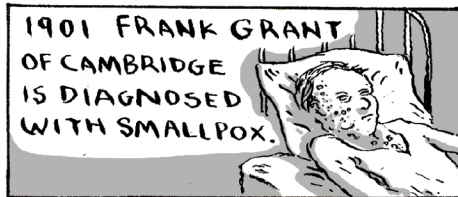
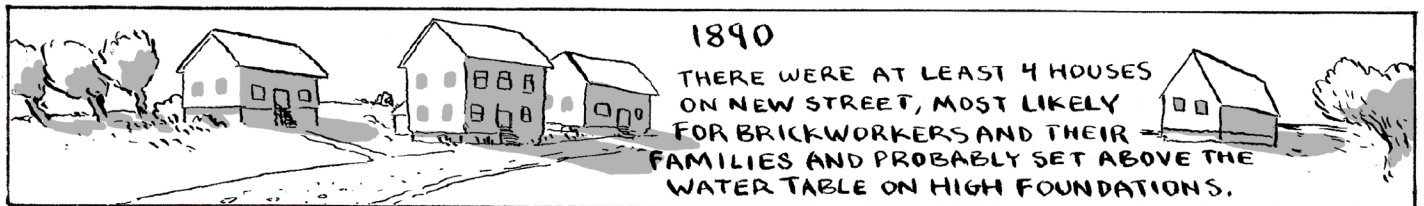
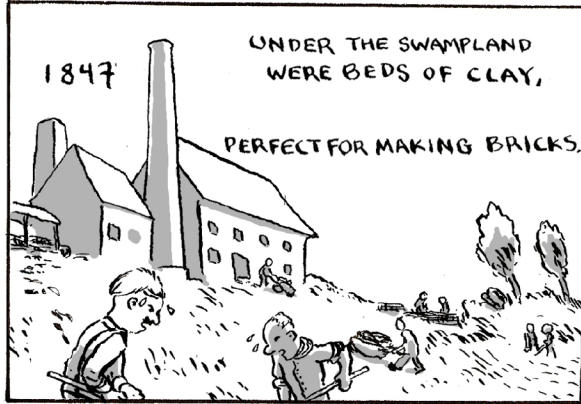
STORY BY SUSAN MATHESON AND BRUCE IRVING

ART BY SPENCER HAWKES

EDITED BY ROHO

1600

IN LAND-STARVED CAMBRIDGE, SOME SPOTS HAVE SERVED MANY PURPOSES OVER THE CENTURIES. THE LAND ALONG NEW STREET IN NORTHWEST CAMBRIDGE IS ONE OF THOSE HARDWORKING PLOTS.





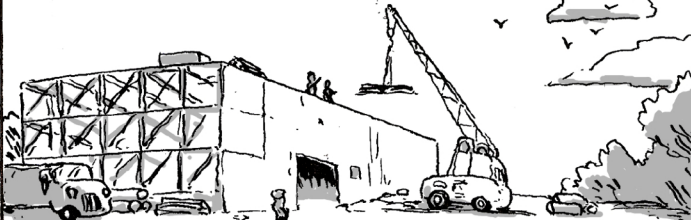
1928: CAMBRIDGE OFFAL  
DEPT. OPENS. MORE THAN  
650 TONS OF GARBAGE  
TABLEWASTE, FRUITS AND  
VEGETABLES, MEATS  
AND FISH, AND BONES  
ARE COLLECTED EACH  
MONTH AND SOLD  
TO PIG FARMERS.



1952: CITY DUMP OPENS. THE ABANDONED  
CLAY PITS (AT THE FUTURE SITE OF  
DANEHY PARK) ARE FILLED WITH  
HOUSEHOLD TRASH AND REFUSE.



1956-1962

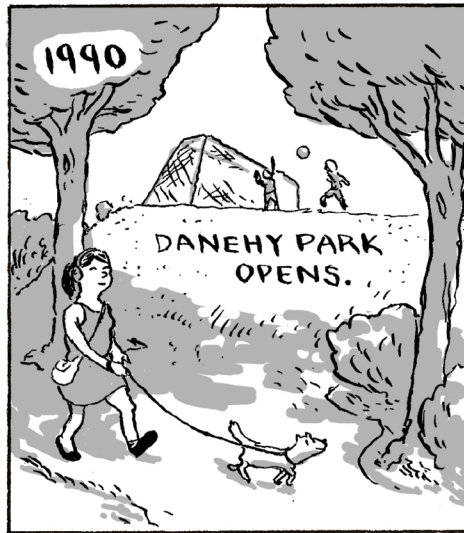


PREST-O-LITE FACTORY CLOSES AND FRESH  
POND SHOPPING CENTER OPENS.

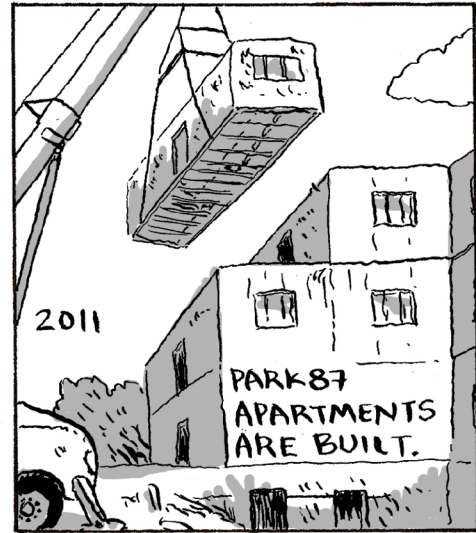
1962-1971 OFFAL PLANT AND CITY  
DUMP CLOSE.



1969 J&C ADAMS CO,  
WINDOW AND DOOR  
RETAILER OPENS.



DANEHY PARK  
OPENS.

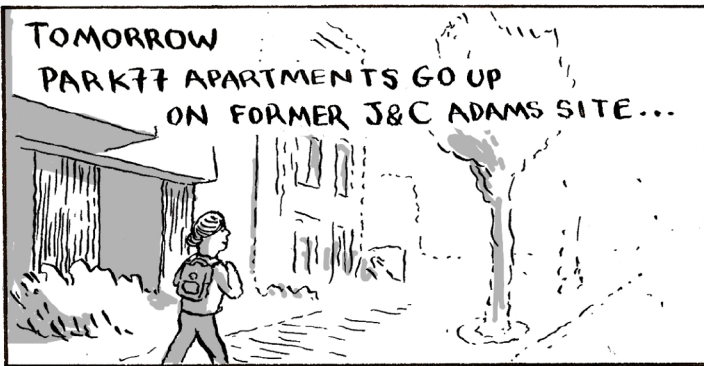


PARK 87  
APARTMENTS  
ARE BUILT.



TODAY

PARK 87



TOMORROW  
PARK 77 APARTMENTS GO UP  
ON FORMER J&C ADAMS SITE...

Sources: Cambridge Chronicle, Cambridge Tribune, Cambridge City maps, Danehy Park brochure, AbodeZ LLC, and Fresh Pond: The History of Cambridge Landscape, by Jill Sinclair. With special thanks to Doug Brown.

Artist: spencerhawkes.com

# FROM THE ARCHIVES: THE SIMPLEX STEERING COMMITTEE

By Mark Vassar

In 2010, the Society received the papers of Bill Cavellini, rent control and tenants' rights advocate. They document a great deal about housing activism in Cambridge during the late-20th century, most importantly the Simplex Steering Committee. The Simplex Steering Committee was formed in 1974 by Cambridge residents to implement "neighborhood priorities" for the development of the Simplex site, a 130-acre development that belonged to the now defunct Simplex Wire and Cable Co., located in the northern area of the Cambridgeport Revitalization Development District, east of Cambridgeport proper and bounded by Massachusetts Avenue on the north, Pacific Street on the south, Brookline Street on the west, and Purrington Street on the east. Adopted by a near-unanimous vote in a community-wide referendum, these priorities included the creation of new affordable housing, blue-collar light-industrial job opportunities, open park land, and, in general, minimization of the negative social and environmental impacts of the high-end commercial development planned by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (the majority landowner of the property, M.I.T. acquired some 80 percent of it through purchases beginning in 1969).

M.I.T. proposed a 27-acre, two-million-square-foot development of commercial buildings for research and development and general office use, and hired Forest City Enterprises, Inc., a Cleveland, Ohio-based real estate management and development firm, to develop the site. In 1987, dissatisfied with Forest City's plans and their lack of sufficient housing and open spaces, the Simplex Steering Committee began a



Source: Bill Cavellini Papers, Cambridge Historical Society

Tent city formed by the Simplex Steering Committee, 1987.

series of protests and rallies, eventually establishing a "tent city" on a vacant lot owned by the university. As the *New York Times* reported on April 12, 1987, "The group's symbol for M.I.T. [was] the octopus, a creature from the deep with eight tentacles that grabs and destroys our houses and jobs," said committee member Bill Cavellini, a cab driver who lives near the site." The steering committee's efforts were at least partly successful, with the city approving an increase from 110 to 400 residential units, and an increase from 25 percent of units being reserved for low- and moderate-income families to 100 units reserved for low-income families, and 50 units for moderate-income families. It is unclear if the other priorities of the committee, such as additional blue-collar jobs or more park space, were implemented.



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