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PEOPLE AND PLACES

The Remarkable John "Jack" Emerson: Founder of the J. H. Emerson Company

By Daphne Abeel

When Will and George Emerson begin to talk about their family background and their father, who founded the J. H. Emerson Company, they mention somewhat offhandedly that they are descended from a brother of Ralph Waldo Emerson and that their paternal grandfather was related to the artist Maxfield Parrish. But it is only when they begin to describe their father, John "Jack" Emerson, that their interesting and remarkable family legacy becomes clear.

Today, the J. H. Emerson Company, now run by Will and George, is tucked away in a beautiful, well-lit, old brick warehouse on a dead-end street in North Cambridge. When Jack Emerson started the company, in 1928, it was located at 15 Brattle Street, above what was once Woolworth's. While two of his brothers had graduated from Harvard in the field of medicine, Jack was a high school dropout. At loose ends, the native New Yorker moved to Cambridge. He was inventive and mechanically oriented, and through his brothers' connections at Harvard, he began to design and manufacture mechanical devices for the medical profession.

(continued on page 8)



Jack Emerson, with his version of the iron lung

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

The First Century

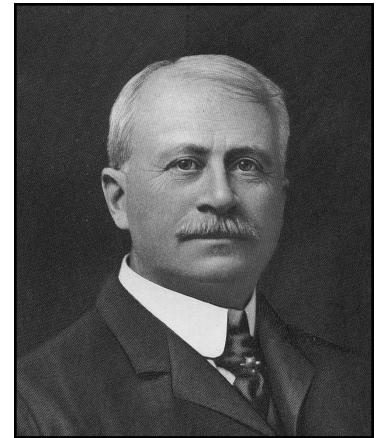
Completing 100 years calls for a celebration of the past and a look to the future. The committee reports on pages 4–6 describe accomplishments of the past year, and our executive director's vision for the future is on page 3. I will comment on our success in fundraising and take a look at the founding of the CHS.

I am pleased to report that in addition to hosting our centennial celebration, Novartis has pledged a leadership gift of \$10,000 to the Society. Karen Falb describes our plans on page 6. Thanks to the work of Bob Crocker and his subcommittee, businesses throughout Cambridge are contributing money to help us reach our goal of raising \$100,000 in our 100th year as the keepers of Cambridge history. Thanks also to Larry Nathanson, who made the initial connection with Novartis and who has put together the program.

We have also been seeking individuals and businesses to underwrite special expenses. With pleasure I can report that the Cambridge Savings Bank has pledged \$20,000 to cover the estimated cost of publishing our centennial book, edited by Daphne Abeel (see page 6). Look for an invitation to our publication party in October, and thank Andy Leighton for making the connection with Cambridge Savings Bank.

It is interesting to look back to June 17, 1905, when 18 people, calling themselves "the subscribers," met to form the Cambridge Historical Society. Richard Henry Dana III, the temporary chairman, appointed two committees, one to present a set of by-laws and the other to nominate a slate of councilors and officers. The approved by-laws included the provision that any Cambridge resident could be nominated for membership and would become a member upon a two-

thirds vote of the Council. The subscribers elected 13 councilors, including Mary Isabella Gozzaldi, Alice Longfellow, and Richard Henry Dana III, who was elected president. A lawyer and civil service reformer, he was the son of the author of *Two Years Before the Mast* and the husband of Edith Longfellow, a daughter of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.



Richard Henry Dana III, first president of the Cambridge Historical Society

Photo from
Cambridge Historical Society Archive

On October 30, 1905, the Society held its second meeting, billed as the "1st Annual Meeting." After reelecting the slate of councilors and officers, the meeting was devoted to the reading of four papers on different aspects of Cambridge history. The papers were published in the first of a series of books called *Cambridge Historical Society Proceedings*. The Society published these books regularly until 1979 and as funding has permitted since then. The *Proceedings* are our legacy and are truly a treasure trove of Cambridge history.

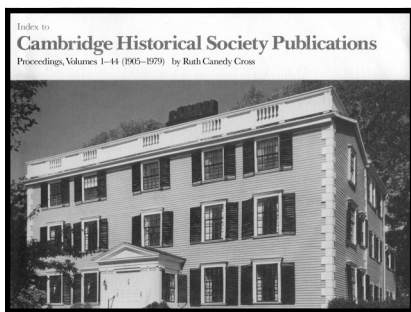
Ted Hansen

FROM THE DIRECTOR

A Vision for the Second Century

The Cambridge Historical Society has come a long way since 1905, when it was founded to encourage research on Cambridge history and to publish the results. While we continue that tradition, we also present public programs, care for the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, and maintain the archives that have resulted from 100 years of documenting Cambridge history. To do all of these things properly, the Society needs to be staffed by house museum, preservation, and archives professionals.

This year we made great strides in our archives because we created the position of resident archivist for Mark Vassar. Mark manages the archives on the periphery of his full-time job at the State Archives, and he donates many hours. We are fortunate to have a person with his talent living in the house, but our future must include at least a half-time position for an experienced archivist.



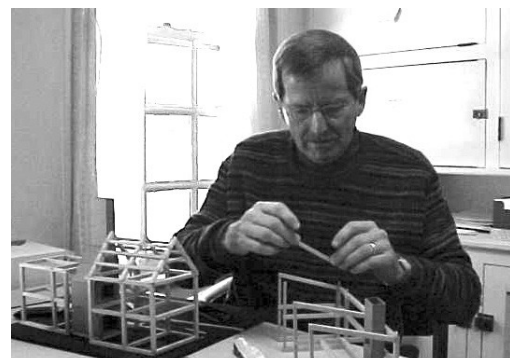
This index to the CHS *Proceedings* is a 305-page oversized volume.

I am greatly impressed by the quality of the papers presented to the Society in the last hundred years and by the publications that resulted. We have published *Proceedings*, not because they will ever be best sellers, but because we believe local history needs to be recorded for future generations. I hope that starting in 2005, with our centennial volume, we can publish a book on some aspect of Cambridge history every three years.

The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House is one of only two 17th-century houses in the city. Through tours of the building, we can tell the story of American architecture and the historic preservation movement. Through the people who have lived in the house, we can explain how our community developed. Through our collections, we can tell stories about the history of our city as a whole, and using our new Cultural Landscape Report, we can begin to interpret the landscape history of the house and the vicinity. I would like the interpretation of the house to be at the level of the best house tours in the country. The house could be a magnet for school field trips and should be a place that all of Cambridge knows about, has visited, and is proud to support.

My vision for the archives, publications, and interpretation will take a lot of money. To begin with, we need to build our endowment from its present level of approximately \$500,000 to well over \$2 million. Ambitious? Yes indeed. But if ever there was a time to aim for the stars, this centennial year is certainly the perfect launch pad.

Karen L. Davis



Volunteer Rory O'Connor, repairing the wooden model of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House used in our interpretive programs

Photo by Lewis Bushnell

ANNUAL MEETING

The Society Turns 100

On February 13, President Ted Hansen presided at the Society's hundredth annual meeting. The Society transacted its regular business, including the election of officers, councilors, and advisors (see page 2). Committee reports follow:

Treasurer's Report

Andrew Leighton, Treasurer

It is a pleasure to report that the Cambridge Historical Society finished the year 2004 showing a small surplus from operations and an increase in the market value of its investments. Operating income, both restricted and unrestricted, rose from \$86,946 to \$99,755. Membership and program fees, gifts, and investment returns all improved. A highlight of the year was a very successful fundraiser at the Asa Gray House (88 Garden Street) in May. Regular operating expenses, excluding capital improvements, rose from \$84,025 to \$94,225.

The recovery in stock prices continued in 2004 and generated a gain of \$16,108 for the investment portfolio. The market value of the Society's investments on December 31, 2004, was \$543,580. Overall, the Society's finances were strengthened; its fund balances increased by \$8,488 to end the year at \$563,139.

Facilities Planning Committee

Nancy Woods, Chair

The year 2004 was characterized by some repairs, a lot of planning, and the completion of a Cultural Landscape Report. Our major building project was the replacement of the leaking asphalt shingle roof over our front entry with historically appropriate wood shingles.

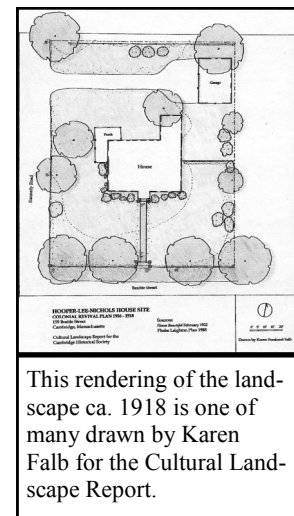
We applied for and received a Cambridge Community Preservation Act grant of \$50,000 to replace the house and garage roofs. The 2005 project will include stabilizing the roof balustrade to prevent its bowing out under a

heavy snow. The terms of the grant require \$25,000 in matching funds from the CHS.

We are grateful to Bill Bibbins for his advice and contributions to our fence project. The gateway remains to be completed when funding permits.

We developed a comprehensive costing plan, a prioritized list of anticipated repairs and replacements for the house and grounds. The list was developed partly as a result of a detailed house inspection donated by Mark George of Home Inspection Associates.

At my request, Karen Forslund Falb researched and wrote a Cultural Landscape Report, describing the boundary changes, land uses, and social history of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols property from the early years of Cambridge to the present. This document extends what we know about the property beyond the Historic Structures Report done by Anne Grady and Sarah Zimmerman in 1981 and the archaeological study done by Nancy Seasholes in 1986.



Shelagh Hadley continues her excellent care and feeding of our front perennial beds and organizing of our volunteer groundspeople. We appreciate the Cambridge Plant and Garden Club's continued support. Its members have contributed time and money to maintain the yard, replacing many of the boxwoods along the west side of the house and relaying the pavers to the back door.

For the fifth consecutive year, we were a featured stop on the route of the Cambridge Public Library's Secret Garden Tour.

Collections Committee

Lindsay Leard Coolidge, Curator

The Collections Committee, including Susan Adams, Renny Little, Dennis Marnon, Marilee Meyer, and Mark Vassar, spent the past year examining, reorganizing, and refocusing the collection. After several meetings studying the collection, the committee realized that a number of objects did not relate to Cambridge history or families. I then spent two months reading the minutes, reports, and correspondence of the Society from 1905 to the present to learn why and when objects had entered the collection. In some cases, furniture was given “to fill the house” with the understanding that when more appropriate furnishings were donated or purchased, those donations could be replaced. As a consequence, the committee, with the approval of the Council, is deaccessioning about 20 objects, which will be sold at CRN Auctions in Cambridge this spring. We will use the proceeds to build and restore the collection.

With the deaccessioned objects removed from the house, we began to reorganize the rooms for the centennial exhibition opening on June 17. The Colonial furniture is now in the parlor—the oldest part of the house—and the Colonial Revival furniture is in Chandler’s Colonial Revival library. The two upstairs rooms are functioning more as exhibition spaces, with the Rupert Lillie models in the Naples Room and domestic arts and children’s toys in the East Chamber. The latter will also house a table for researchers.

During our examination of the collection, we discovered a few treasures. Susan Adams is researching a chair believed to have belonged to Benjamin Franklin. The piece is French in style, yet it was most likely crafted in Philadelphia, making it highly unusual and extremely important. Also, I uncovered a significant provenance for the large Chippendale desk in the parlor, tracing it back to Abraham Hill, who lived on Brattle Street until his death in 1754.

We asked the antique furniture restorer Robert Mussey to remove the five inches of wood that had been added to the legs of the Chippendale desk in the 20th century. He remarked that it was one of the most interesting pieces he had ever worked on.



Chippendale desk after restoration
by Robert Mussey

Photo by Joe King

Barbara Mangum conserved our collection of Lillie models (see page 10). The models document how four existing Cambridge houses, including the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, looked during the Colonial era as well as the Colonial Revival spirit that inspired them. We are grateful to the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati for funding the restoration.

I have completed the text for our centennial exhibition catalogue, “100 Years of Cambridge: Highlights from the Collection of the Cambridge Historical Society.” Lewis Bushnell and Joe King have taken the photographs for this publication.

Finally, we received a splendid collection of souvenir plates and cups of Cambridge scenes from Renny Little. They will be displayed with our collection of Washington Elm china. We were also promised a gift of a grandfather’s clock belonging to Samuel Bachelder as well as a portrait of this illustrious member of the Society. It is precisely these types of gifts that continue to strengthen our collection as we move into the next hundred years.

Publications Committee Report

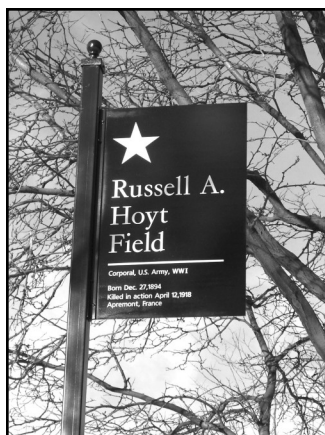
Daphne Abeel, Editor

As you know, we have continued to publish *The Newetowne Chronicle* three times a year. We are pleased that Thelma O'Brien, an experienced journalist, has joined the committee and contributes to the newsletter. Others who put special effort into the newsletter include Michael Kenney, Luise Erdmann, Karen Davis, and Lewis Bushnell.

The Publications Committee's larger, current project is the Society's centennial volume, to be published in October 2005. The book will contain 18 essays on such subjects as Cambridge architecture, literary life in Cambridge, the origin of the Cambridge Plant and Garden Club, folk music in Cambridge, Cambridge politics, town and gown relations, important Cambridge women, life on Coolidge Hill, the Jewish community in Cambridge, immigrants to Cambridge, and, of course, the history of the Cambridge Historical Society itself.

We are grateful to the many contributors and to the Cambridge Savings Bank for underwriting the estimated cost of the publication. The volume will stand as an exciting and informative contribution to the history of Cambridge in the 20th century and help to expand CHS's outreach to a broader community.

As a result of Michael Kenney's article in the 2004 summer issue of *The Newetowne Chronicle*, the city erected this commemorative marker to Russell A. Hoyt at the field bearing his name.



Centennial Fundraiser: From NECCO to Novartis

Karen F. Falb, Event Chair

May 15, 2:30 p.m. SAVE THE DATE.

Have you ever wondered about where candy and pharmaceuticals are made? This party at the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research, in the former NECCO factory at 250 Massachusetts Avenue, will illuminate the history of these two important companies in East Cambridge. Thanks to our hosts at Novartis, it will be the largest and most festive event ever held by the Cambridge Historical Society.

Our plans include tours of the building's dramatic interior spaces, which were created during a major renovation that restored the building's exterior to its original 1927 appearance. Following tours of the campus, we will hear from the architectural firms involved in the transformation (Tsoi/Kobus and Stubbins Associates, both of Cambridge) and from the CEO of NECCO, Domenic Antonellis. Charles Sullivan, executive director of the Cambridge Historical Commission and our keynote speaker, will describe the transition of Cambridge from a manufacturing city to a biotechnology center.

No birthday would be complete without festive food, a cake, gifts for guests, and best wishes. The mayor of Cambridge, Michael Sullivan, will offer a proclamation and congratulations, as will Jeffrey Lockwood, director of External and Government Relations for Novartis, and Ted Hansen, president of the CHS.

Look for an invitation in mid-April. You don't have to be a member to attend, but this is a great year to join the CHS. It will be a birthday party long remembered in the history of the Society.

FROM THE LIBRARY & ARCHIVE

Mark Time

by Mark Vassar

A volunteer recently asked me, “What does an archivist do?” In response, I’ve outlined the five major tasks.

Whether a collection is composed of personal diaries, photographs, or business records, **identification** is the first task. Providing basic information — who created the records and why, the dates they cover, the size of the collection, and the order in which they arrived—allows the archivist to engage in the next task, **appraisal**.

This is when the archivist evaluates the collection. If a collection had no connection to Cambridge, it is likely that we would offer it to an appropriate organization.

Once a decision has been made to keep the collection, the issue of **preservation** must be addressed. Different types of records require different treatment for their long-term preservation. It is imperative to make decisions about how best to store them to retain their physical integrity.

The next two tasks go hand-in-hand, **physical arrangement** and **description**. The archivist determines the physical order of the records that is the most systematic and useful. Then a description is prepared. Generally known as a finding aid, it enables researchers to read about the collection to determine if it is something they would like to consult. I will explain finding aids in greater detail in the next newsletter.

Finally, the archivist must be able to provide **access**, both physical and intellectual, to the collection so that researchers can obtain information to complete histories, biographies, genealogies, or other projects.

Mark Vassar is the resident archivist at the CHS.

Any Questions?

by Brian Youmans

The Society was kept busy with inquiries in the past year. Looking back through the questions and answers, I compiled some statistics.

We received a total of 91 questions, of which 47 were related to research (amateur or academic), 26 genealogical, 8 about objects with a Cambridge connection, and 10 “other.” Forty came from Massachusetts, 34 from outside Massachusetts, and 17 from the Internet, place unknown.

Researching the inquiries gives us new information about Cambridge history and people, information that ends up in the CHS subject files. One e-mail was about Isabel Carlton Wilde, a gallery owner and important early collector of folk art who lived in Cambridge in the 1920s. Another inquiry about an old photograph led me to learn a little about Amory Houghton (1812–1882), the founder of Corning Glass, whose first ventures in the glass business occurred in Cambridge around 1850. An e-mail from Peabody inquired about Abraham Hyde, a Cambridge resident around 1920 and the founder of A. R. Hyde & Co. of Columbia Street, which became Saucony, Inc.



Saucony no longer manufactures shoes here but still has a retail outlet on Cambridge Street.

The coming year will bring many more inquiries and interesting findings. I will share some of them with you in future columns.

Brian Youmans is a volunteer researcher.
research@cambridgehistory.org

PEOPLE AND PLACES

The Lost Diners of Cambridge

Showing slides that drew sounds of recognition and triggered feelings of nostalgia, Richard Gutman, a well-known diner historian, described the origins, architecture, menus, and even demolition of these modest eateries with humor and rue. He also showed pictures of an exhibition he's mounted at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, which now houses some of his comprehensive collection of diner memorabilia.

Gutman firmly pointed out that diner design did not emerge from railroad cars but from the horse-drawn carts of the late 1870s, which served the original American takeout. Their portability morphed them into "dining cars." "They were immediately popular," Gutman said. "The diner was where everyone felt comfortable."

Cambridge, Gutman thinks, had about 10 diners, a surprising number of which he photographed. He narrated some of their histories, beginning with the earliest example, the Bostonian Café in Kendall Square, which opened in 1909. "We know it was a Worcester Lunch Car [the manufacturer] but its fate is a mystery," Gutman said. Likewise the fate of the Kells, at 358 Mass. Ave. (near Sidney St.), dating from about 1938.



The Kitchenette is one of the lost diners of Cambridge. Also gone are The Grill, Bob's, A Meal or A Snack, Murphy's, Victory, and the F & T.

Photo courtesy of Richard Gutman

Describing the varied styles and iconography, from Tennessee marble counters to postwar

Formica, from ubiquitous red exteriors to slick stainless, and from the anchored look to the streamlined container designed to look like a moving vehicle, Gutman said local diners were quite small because "I think people in New England loved small, cramped quarters." They also apparently loved 35-cent oatmeal, griddle-cakes, and "grilled bologna and veg" dinners, judging from the menu offerings.

Guests at the lecture enjoyed hearty refreshments compliments of Don Levy of the Deluxe Town Diner (Watertown) and Billy Nichols of the Rosebud Diner (Somerville).

One of Gutman's books, *American Diners Then and Now* (2000), covers 1,400 examples of these beloved American restaurants.

Thelma O'Brien

Jack Emerson

(continued from page 1)

One of his first designs was the Barcroft-Warburg apparatus for the Harvard Botany Department. It held vials of liquids and shook them to keep them in motion. Later, he designed the micromanipulator, which made it possible to move a slide under a microscope. Then came the galvanometer, which measured voltages using quartz fibers.

Said Will Emerson, "He was always talking to people at Harvard about what they needed, and that's how he heard about the iron lung. He had always been interested in the mechanics of breathing.

"My father did not invent the iron lung, and he was very clear about that. What he did was to improve on Harvard's design and make it better." In the 1930s, there was a major polio epidemic. "Dad had made a number of improvements to the iron lung design, and he took his idea to Harvard. They ignored him, so he just went ahead and showed his model at a trade show."

By the early 1930s, Emerson decided that the Brattle Street space was too small and moved to the current location. In the 1950s, he

(continued from previous page)

devised an underwater breathing device that was used by the navy. In the 1960s, he designed a simple and reliable ventilator that could inflate the lungs. It was used by many hospitals, including Massachusetts General. It was also used in Vietnam during the war.

Both Will and George Emerson remember working for their father throughout their high school years. George graduated in 1975 from M.I.T. with a degree in engineering and worked briefly for Digital Equipment Corporation. He joined his father's company in 1980. Will attended Boston University in the late 1960s. The brothers grew up in a house on Spy Pond in Arlington. George, who manages research and development, still lives in Arlington. Will, the company's administrator, lives in Framingham.

Today, the company's most successful product is called a CoughAssist. Literally, it helps people to cough and was used in the treatment of the actor Christopher Reeve after his devastating horseback riding accident. Said George, "The CoughAssist machine has allowed the company to grow over the last 10 years. This apparatus is used all over the world."

When Jack Emerson died, he held 20 patents. Said Will, "He had pancreatic cancer and died in February 1997, but he literally worked until the end. He attended two trade shows, in San Diego and San Francisco, in the fall of 1996."

Will and George, now in their 50s, say they plan to keep the company going as long as they can. "We're not thinking about retirement or anything like that yet," said George. "We'll just see how things go."

"Our father could have been a multimillionaire, but that wasn't what he was interested in," said Will. "He just wanted to help people."

Calendar of Events

Thursday, March 31

Dana Fellow Event at the Joseph Emerson Worcester House*

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Place: 121 Brattle Street

Charles Sullivan, executive director of the Cambridge Historical Commission, will discuss the architectural and social history of this extraordinary Brattle Street residence built by a 19th-century lexicographer. Tour the house and enjoy refreshments provided by Hammond Real Estate, sponsor of this event (by invitation only).

* Dana Fellows hold CHS memberships at or above the \$100 level.

Thursday, April 14

Looking Backward: Club 47 and the 1960s Folk Music Revival

Time: 6:30–8:30 p.m.

Place: Hooper-Lee-Nichols House

Fee: \$5 members, \$10 nonmembers

Did you know that Joan Baez got her start right here in Cambridge? Come hear Millie Rhan, a folklorist, relive the folk music scene and hey-day of Club 47. Millie's historic photos and recordings will bring back memories for those who frequented Harvard Square in the 1960s.

Sunday, May 15

Centennial Fundraiser: From NECCO to Novartis

Time: 2:30–5:30 p.m.

Place: 250 Massachusetts Avenue

Join us for a celebration of our 100th birthday. Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research is hosting us at their new research headquarters—the former NECCO factory on Massachusetts Avenue. (See page 6 for details.)

Friday, June 17

Centennial Exhibition

Time: Late afternoon

Place: Hooper-Lee-Nichols House

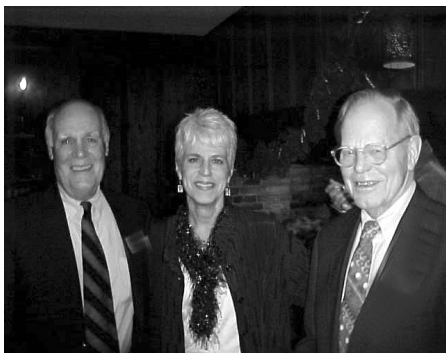
Fee: Free and open to the public

Tour the house and view the most significant objects collected by the Society. Pick up an exhibition catalogue, take a stroll in our garden, and enjoy light refreshments.

Our Festive Holiday Party



(l-r) Local author Sage Stossel and former CHS executive director Renny Little were among the nearly 100 guests at the party.



(l-r) Ted Hansen, Nancy Woods, and John Moot. The CHS is grateful to Nancy, who is leaving the Council after serving for six years.

Special thanks to the following caterers for their donations: The Basil Tree, Bon Appetit, The Catered Affair, Catering by Debbie, Cuisine Chez Vous, East Meets West, Kayo and Company, Riley to the Rescue, and Tables of Content. Thanks also to our members who contributed food and drink: Daphne Abeel, Kathy Born, Tom Bracken, Meredith Christensen, Bob Crocker, Karen Falb, Ted Hansen, Chandra Harrington, Ellen Moot, Thelma O'Brien, Sue Poverman, and Nancy Woods.

Thanks to Ruth Crocker and Beth Meyer for decorating the house and to Jeannie Donovan and her friends, who have played festive Celtic music for our party for the past five years.

The 100th Annual Meeting



Executive director Karen Davis presents her vision for the future of the Society (see page 3) to members and guests.



Sculpture and decorative arts conservator Barbara Mangum captivated the audience with her description of the techniques she used to conserve the Rupert B. Lillie models. She said it was the most challenging project of her 20-year career.



Members and guests viewed the restored Lillie models of four "Tory Row" houses. Pictured is the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. The models are on display as part of the permanent CHS collection.

Thanks to Karen Falb for organizing the refreshments, including special centennial cookies and the traditional cocoa.

Thank you, 2004 Annual Fund Donors

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 Tod Beaty and the
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 new homeowners.

Membership Application

Please check a category

To learn about benefits for specific categories,
 please call the CHS office at 617/547-4252.

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An additional donation of _____ is enclosed to help CHS preserve and maintain the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House.
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 Make checks payable to the Cambridge Historical Society and mail to 159 Brattle Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Centennial Celebration



The new Novartis research headquarters, in the former NECCO factory, is the site of our 100th birthday party (see page 6).

The Mission of the Cambridge Historical Society

The Cambridge Historical Society acts as a living repository for Cambridge's tradition and history. It maintains property entrusted to it and collects, preserves, and interprets items of historical and antiquarian significance. The Society encourages research and involvement in these efforts by its members and the community at large. In so doing, it promotes a better understanding of history as an important factor in the everyday affairs of the city and its residents.

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House
159 Brattle Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

"The corporation is constituted for the purpose of collecting and preserving Books, Manuscripts, and other Memorials, of procuring the publication and distribution of the same, and generally of promoting interest and research, in relation to the history of Cambridge...."

CHS by-laws adopted at the first meeting, June 17, 1905