



# THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORIAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

[cambridgehistory.org](http://cambridgehistory.org)

Danehy/Cambridge City Dump, now the site of the 50-acre Mayor Thomas W. Danehy Park. The former landfill was closed to dumping in the early 1970s and reclaimed by the city as a community resource. *Cambridge Historical Commission*

## The DOWNSIDE of PROGRESS

BY DOUG BROWN

CAMBRIDGE HAS MADE A LOT OF THINGS over the centuries, not all of them valuable. Our manufacturing history has its dirty, dangerous downside, and dealing with the hazards and by-products of production has always been a challenge in this jam-packed, 7.1-square-mile city.

By the end of the 19th century, the technological advances of the Second Industrial Revolution were a wonder to behold, but workers would have been less enthusiastic in their praise of conditions. Industrial accidents were a fact of life: A simple slip of the hand might mean the loss of a finger, or more, in one of the city's many furniture factories, while chemical spills, fires, and explosions could do grave damage to an entire neighborhood. Even clandestine operations turned deadly: The *Cambridge Chronicle* of July 1, 1922, reported that "the explosion of an illegal 160-gallon moonshiner's still . . . the largest ever unearthed in this city . . . started a blaze which completely destroyed the plant, caused the death of two persons, and injured several others." New means of transportation brought new dangers too, as speeding automobiles struck down pedestrians and electric trolleys clanked down the middle of streets. Speaking of the many new railroads and their dangers, the Cambridge-based poet and critic James Russell Lowell said, ". . . at least [horses] can't blow up."

### WHAT'S INSIDE?

New Wine in Old Bottles

Vats All Folks!

Our 2017 Events &amp; Programs

From the Archives

FALL 2017

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### The Cambridge Historian

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## From the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We're on the right track. When the Society decided last year to focus our programming on what's relevant today, we knew it was the right thing to do. By choosing a new theme each year that relates to Cantabrigians and exploring the historical nature of that topic, we knew that we could make a difference in the lives of our members, neighbors, and the larger Cambridge community.

How did we do? We won a prestigious national award for our efforts! I'm proud to share that this year we received a Leadership in History award from the American Association for State and Local History for our 2016 Fall Symposium "Housing for All?"

Winning an award in our first year of new programming is a significant accomplishment, and we hope you share our excitement and pride. Your participation makes this—and all of our work—possible. Without you, the continuing story of Cambridge would be incomplete. Thank you for lending your voice to these ongoing, important conversations.

As we wrap up our year of "What Does Cambridge Make?," we've learned so much about this place we call home—the changing nature of work; the tensions of the manufacturing versus the knowledge economy; the history of pollution, craft, and small businesses; and much more. It's been a fulfilling year. I hope you've enjoyed attending our events, meeting other Cantabrigians, and sharing your experiences and thoughts. As we did last year, we've collected all of your "big ideas" and responses from our events for our archives. In future years, historians will be able to look back and see how, in our own words, we were thinking and feeling about the pressing issues of today. Thank you for contributing to our historical record.

Looking ahead, we need you to help us unravel 2018's question, "Where Is Cambridge From?" We'll be exploring identity, belonging, community, and more. I hope you'll join us once again for a year of respectful, contemplative dialogue. The history of our city isn't complete without you. ☺

Warmly,



Marieke Van Damme



Like their Gilded Age industrialist contemporaries, many Cantabrigians had a reason for “developing” the city: making money. Whether they were digging it up, filling it in, dumping, draining, seizing, dividing, or building on it, people profited, and the land suffered the consequences. By 1890, Cambridge was fully industrialized, and garbage was big business. Collection duties were handled by the Streets Department, staffed by teams of paupers from the North Cambridge poor farm. Combustibles were trucked to an incinerator on Main Street, where metal and glass were separated out for reuse. Ash and cinders picked up curbside went to landfill operations, a practice so widespread that today 34 percent of Cambridge sits on filled wetlands and the primary underlying soil type for most of the city is “urban fill.” In the 1930s, a new incinerator on Bolton Street in North Cambridge reduced the overall amount of trash to be handled, but not its impact on air, soil, and water. When the incinerator couldn’t keep up, the city returned to burying and burning its refuse in open pits.

In Alan Emmet’s *Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Changing of a Landscape*, the author describes many of the public health issues. Water pollution was widespread: By the 1870s, the Charles River had become a smelly “waste area,” and Pout Pond in the Highlands was a “dangerous hazard.” In 1900, malaria, cholera, and dysentery were still very much a problem, and the remaining wetlands of West Cambridge were “a stench in the nostril,” [*Cambridge Chronicle*, July 31, 1909] polluted with slaughterhouse waste and overrun with mosquitos. Abandoned clay yards threatened public health; children frequently drowned in unfenced pits. Prior to the turn of the century, a Joint Special Committee on Clay Lands was formed to investigate the matter. Not surprisingly, it recommended new land purchases and continued filling. Today Jerry’s Pit, Blair Pond, and Yates Pond are reminders of this landscape.

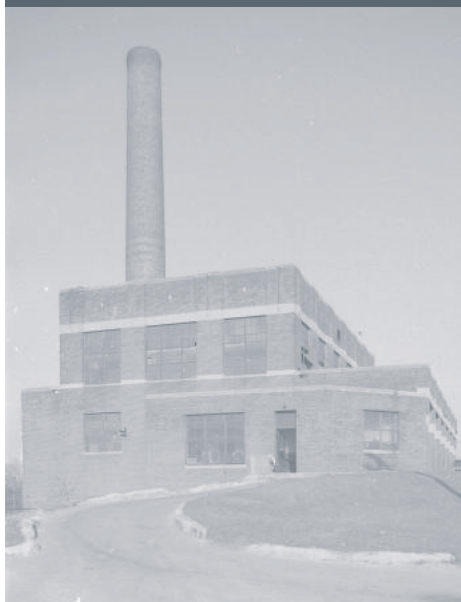
Much of these efforts were paid for with city money, and the results were undoubtedly beneficial. Urban fill helped form Memorial Drive, Greenough Boulevard, and the modern shoreline of Fresh Pond; provided a home for Rindge Towers; and created a spot for the Armory and the Tobin School on the former site of swampy Muskrat Pond. It also remade Mill Pond, a former tidal pool turned city dump and ash heap, into Hoyt Field. Sacramento Field, filled by Harvard in the 1920s, was previously a reservoir for a bleachery next door. Raymond Park, Danehy Park, and the Cambridgeside Galleria—all were erected on filled land, as were public housing projects at Corcoran Park, Briston Arms, Walden Square, and Jefferson Park.

Unfortunately, hidden pollution often went hand-in-hand with urban fill. Besides ash and cinders, bricks, cars, refrigerators, tires, and even industrial waste were buried. Lead and other heavy metals, PCBs, asbestos, fossil fuel by-products, and dry cleaning fluid are common Cambridge soil pollutants. A recent test of a local property revealed lead levels of 100,000 parts per million, 500 times the legal limit. When industrial accidents, gas station spills, and soil contamination from historical auto emissions are added, the state counts more than 1,000 cases of soil or groundwater contamination in the city.

Stringent environmental rules may add costs for those who develop Cambridge land today, but that hasn’t slowed them down. West of Alewife Brook Parkway alone, more than 3,900 new housing units have gone up since 2004, and another 1,000 are currently planned. As the city moves away from a dirtier time, building safely on the remains of that past is today’s challenge. 🍷

Top: Jerry’s Pit (circa 1946), bordered by Rindge Avenue and the dried pits of the New England Brick Co. *Cambridge Historical Commission*

Bottom: The Bolton Street Incinerator in North Cambridge (circa 1960). A three-story brick structure, it was built in the early 1900s and demolished in the early 1970s. *Cambridge Historical Commission*





31 Church Street, formerly the site of a carriage repair shop and now a Starbucks. Edward Jacoby, Cambridge Historical Commission, 1972



## NEW WINE in OLD BOTTLES

BY MICHAEL KENNEY

SUNDAY BRUNCH TIME AND WEEKDAY HAPPY HOURS, the courtyard at the corner of Broadway and Hampshire Street is a lively place, with hipsters and families enjoying the bars and restaurants grouped around the open brick-paved space. Hard to believe, but it was even more bustling a century ago, when shifts of workers came and went at the vast complex of the Boston Woven Hose and Rubber Company, one of the biggest manufacturers of hydraulic hose in the country, employing nearly a thousand and operating around the clock at the turn of the 20th century.

The Cambridge Brewing Company and The Smoke Shop now occupy what were once offices and the finishing department at the corner. Circling clockwise, there is BeanTowne Coffee House & Café in the former mill room building, then Mamaleh's Delicatessen, Bon Me, State Park, and The Friendly Toast, all in the old machine shop building.

One Kendall Square, as the collection of buildings is now known, is a prime example of a certain kind of adaptive reuse in Cambridge, a place that used to make something (in its case, fire hoses and Bulldog garden hoses) and now makes something else (great meals, classy cocktails, and tasty beer). Or, if you will, a case of new wine in old bottles.

It's not the only such place in town. Clues are sometimes to be found in the names, like Puritan & Company at 1166 Cambridge Street, which Zagat calls a "'farm-to-plate hipster' joint in Cambridge [that] could easily hold its own in larger cities." Its building was once the Puritan Cake Company, where until the 1950s a dozen delivery vans might line up along the street to distribute its freshly baked goods.

*Clues are sometimes to be found in the names, like Puritan & Company at 1166 Cambridge Street, which Zagat calls a "'farm-to-plate hipster' joint . . . [that] could easily hold its own in larger cities."*

The only clue to the past at Lamplighter Brewing Company at 284 Broadway is the sign of its previous occupant, Metric Systems, an auto-repair shop that closed two years ago, its name still hanging at the corner of the building.

On Church Street in Harvard Square, where the baristas at Starbucks now make a mean mocha latte, James White's 19th-century shop once repaired horse-drawn carriages.

In Cambridgeport, the Ford Motor Company's old plant at 640 Memorial Drive built Model T's until the company realized that a horizontal assembly line made more sense than a four-story vertical one and moved the plant to Somerville. Remodeled several times, the plant has now been re-engineered to meet the demanding specifications of the modern bio-science industry, with 225,748 square feet of Class A lab space leased out to Sanofi-Genzyme and other, smaller firms by its owner, Alexandria Real Estate Equities.

The old NECCO plant at 254 Massachusetts Avenue was famous for the water tower painted to resemble a packaged roll of its colorful sugar wafers. Today it is the center of several buildings occupied by the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research, where white-suited lab workers invent new disease-fighting drugs. On the street level, folks at the Flour Bakery + Cafe make on site most of what's on the menu, including a delicious banana bread and old-fashioned sour cream pound cake.

Elsewhere in the city, old industrial buildings have been repurposed for what is perhaps Cambridge's most thriving industry—housing.

At Broadway and Boardman Street is the factory that produced Squirrel Nut Zippers, converted to 20 units of affordable housing in 2002 by Just-A-Start Corporation. Adjacent to it is a community garden with 34 plots. In Central Square, the Kennedy Biscuit Lofts at 129 Franklin Street markets itself as the “home of the Fig Newton cookie.” Now a mix of affordable and market-rate units, it offers concierge service and a catering kitchen.

Outside Porter Square, at 75 Richdale Avenue, is the Payne Elevator Company building, which was converted to residential lofts in 1995. Just down the street, where bread was once baked in quantity, the newly opened Hathaway Lofts at 15 Richdale Avenue offer 46 loft-style apartments in “an elegant fusion of luxury and history,” all in a reclaimed 1910 bakery complex. And there's even a charging station for your electric car, which saves you some bread. ☺



Church Street Starbucks, Bruce Irving



Top: Hathaway Bakery, circa 1912. “... a business that has made wonderful strides—a shop with a capacity of 50,000 loaves of bread per day...” (*Cambridge Chronicle*, May 6, 1911) Deeks Collection, Cambridge Historical Commission

Bottom: Current photo of the Hathaway building, today the site of modern luxury loft apartments. Bruce Irving



# VAT'S ALL FOLKS!

BY JOE GALUSHA & BRUCE IRVING  
ART BY LJ-BAPTISTE

A KEY INDUSTRY IN COLONIAL CAMBRIDGE WAS TANNING COWHIDES, WHICH INVOLVED STEEPING FRESH HIDES IN OPEN PITS--ESSENTIALLY IN-GROUND VATS--FILLED WITH CHEMICALS EXTRACTED FROM OAK OR HEMLOCK BARK. TANNING WAS CONCENTRATED ALONG MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE FROM KIRKLAND STREET TO PORTER SQUARE.

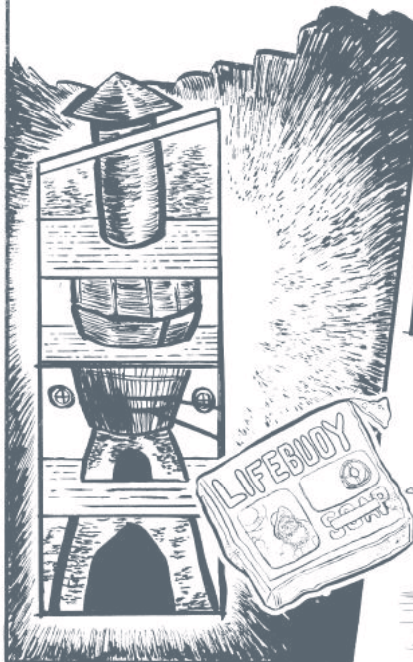
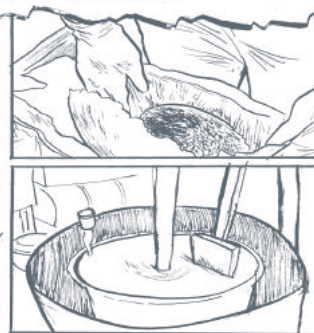


THE BLAKE & KNOWLES STEAM PUMP CO. BEGAN WHEN GEORGE BLAKE INVENTED A PUMP TO KEEP NORTH CAMBRIDGE'S CLAYPITS DRY. THEY MELTED 50 TONS OF IRON A DAY TO CAST A VARIETY OF PUMPS.



THE LEVER BROTHERS CO. FACTORY SPRAWLED ACROSS 30 BUILDINGS IN KENDALL SQUARE AND INCLUDED A 6-STORY MELTING-OUT HOUSE TO PREPARE OILS AND FATS FOR USE IN SOAP-MAKING. THE ODIFEROUS OPERATION WAS SUCCESSFUL UNTIL IT CLOSED IN 1959, WHEN THE INDUSTRY SHIFTED TO SYNTHETIC INGREDIENTS, LEAVING THE FACTORY'S TECHNOLOGY OBSOLETE.

FOUNDED IN 1858, CARTER'S INK WAS THE WORLD'S LARGEST INK MANUFACTURER BY 1884. MANUFACTURING STARTED ON THE 4TH FLOOR OF ITS FIRST STREET FACTORY, WHERE VARIOUS TANKS WERE USED FOR MIXING AND BOILING THE INK.



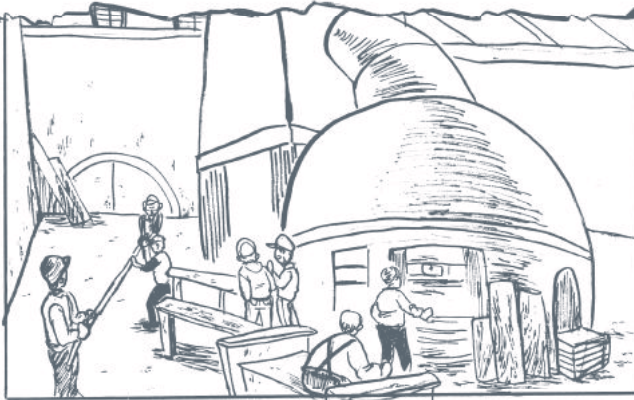
THE NEW ENGLAND GLASS CO. IN EAST CAMBRIDGE OPERATED THREE COAL-POWERED FURNACES, FED FROM THE BASEMENT TO PROVIDE THE GLASSBLOWERS A RESPITE FROM COAL DUST.



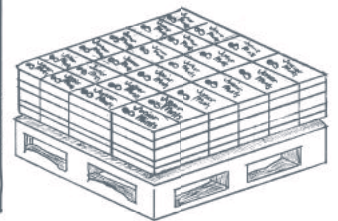


*Over the centuries, industries have used vats to make what Cambridge makes.*

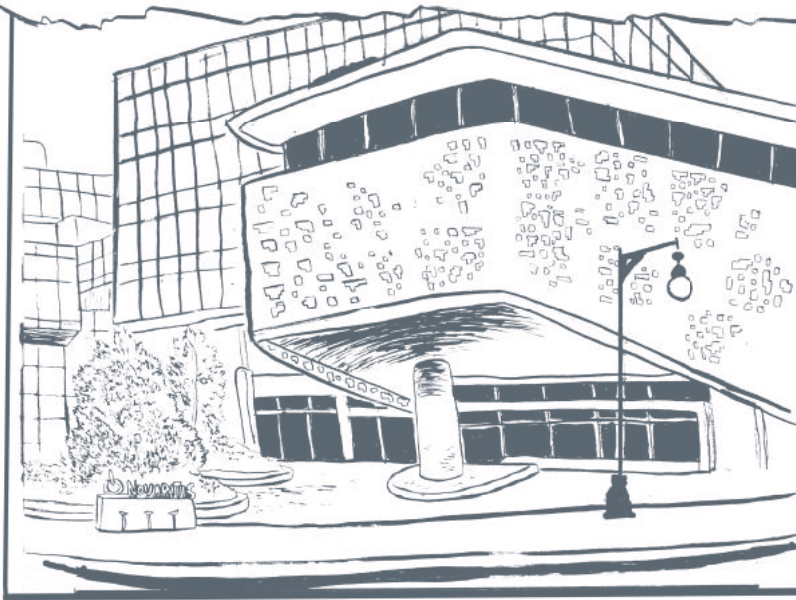
SAND, LEAD, AND OTHER INGREDIENTS WERE MELTED TOGETHER IN LARGE POTS INSIDE THE FURNACES (10 POTS TO A FURNACE), EACH CAPABLE OF HOLDING AT LEAST A TON OF MOLTEN GLASS. THE GLASS WAS THEN MOUTH-BLOWN OR PRESSED INTO VARIED SHAPES, INCLUDING GLASSES, DECANTERS, AND VASES.



JUNIOR MINTS WERE ORIGINALLY MANUFACTURED BY THE JAMES O. WELCH CO., FOUNDED IN 1927 AT 810 MAIN STREET. MINT WAS MIXED IN ONE VAT, FORMED INTO PIECES, AND COATED IN CHOCOLATE IN ANOTHER VAT. THE COMPANY WAS SOLD IN 1963 AND ENDED UP IN THE HANDS OF TOOTSIE ROLL INDUSTRIES, WHICH STILL PRODUCES MORE THAN 15 MILLION JUNIOR MINTS A DAY IN CAMBRIDGE.



NOVARTIS IS THE LARGEST CORPORATE EMPLOYER IN CAMBRIDGE, WITH RESEARCH ITS PRIMARY MISSION. ONE RESEARCH TOOL IS THE QUBE, WHICH COSTS AS MUCH AS A HOUSE. CELLS, SUSPENDED IN SOLUTIONS WITH EXPERIMENTAL COMPOUNDS, ARE PLACED INTO SMALL TRAYS--384 SAMPLE WELLS PER TRAY--AND ZAPPED WITH ELECTRICITY TO OBSERVE REACTIONS AT THE CELLULAR LEVEL.



IN MODERN CAMBRIDGE, INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION HAS THUS SHIFTED TO SMALL-SCALE WORK AIMED AT BIG BREAKTHROUGHS.



QUBE

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# THANK YOU for Your Participation! You Made It Happen!

THIS YEAR'S SERIES OF PROGRAMS—asking “What Does Cambridge Make?”—explored the past and present of “making” in Cambridge, from manufacturing to craftivism, bookmaking and printing, sewing and the “Bee” movement, bread-making and brick-making, and Kendall Square’s biotech labs and maker spaces. We can’t wait to include you in our plans for 2018, exploring the theme “Where Is Cambridge From?”

## ANNUAL SPRING BENEFIT: MAY 3

This year’s benefit—held at the fascinating MIT Museum—was a great success, with over 100 local history lovers in attendance. The focus was on food, beverages, and fun, as representatives from local companies spoke on their experiences with “Made in Cambridge.”



## HISTORY CAFÉS

This year brought nearly 170 attendees to our History Cafés, indicating a strong interest among Cantabrigians in our innovative programming.



April 27: History Café & Walking Tour: “When Crafty Women Move Domestic Arts to the Public Realm.” Attendees walked past “Bee” member homes and engaged in a parlor conversation about craftivist moments.



May 9: “Candy, Soap, or Beer? Working Life in the Port Neighborhood of Cambridge.” After a tour of the Port, participants heard about Lamplighter Brewery’s modern-day story of beer-making in Cambridge.



June 15: “Common Goods.” A workshop by Cambridge Arts on the Cambridge Common explored how new uses for older craft traditions change our perspectives. It was followed by a conversation at the Hong Kong restaurant in Harvard Square.



## HOOPER-LEE-NICHOLS HOUSE TOURS

During these Sunday afternoon tours from April to September at the home of the Historical Society, guests explored the chronology of the house—from its beginnings in 1685 to the current day.



September 12: “Whose Kendall?” Walking tour of Kendall Square and conversation at Cambridge Brewing Company.



September 16: “Cambridge Discovery Day: Five Senses Over Five Centuries at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House.” This year, the Society participated in the Historical Commission’s annual Discovery Day events. Led by expert tour guide Daniel Berger-Jones of Cambridge Historical Tours, we were able to experience many of the sounds, smells, tastes, images, and textures that were typical of the past five centuries.

*Thanks to our many excellent speakers and moderators for getting us thinking with these great conversations:*

**April:** Pamela Baldwin, Diana Lempel, Stephen Pinkerton

**May:** Marian Darlington-Hope, Robin Harris, Cayla Marvil

**June:** Judith Leeman, Laura Roberts, Ezra Shales, Allison Smith

**July:** Doug Brown, Joe Galusha, Eric Grunebaum

**September 12:** Peter Abair, Daniel Berger-Jones, Rainey Tisdale

**September 27:** Dwai Banerjee, Rachel Murray, Robert Skenderian

**October 2:** Henrietta Davis, Sam Lipson, Dr. Phillip Sharp, Robin Wolfe Scheffler

**October 18:** Mimi Graney, David Sun Kong, Debra Morris, Robin Wolfe Scheffler

*Special thanks to our 2017 Lead Sponsor, IRB Real Estate, for supporting a year’s worth of community programming!*

Thank you to our venue sponsors for supporting the Society and keeping Cambridge curious and vibrant! We loved spending time in your spaces: Alnylam Pharmaceuticals, Cambridge Brewing Company, Cambridge Public Library, Google Cambridge, Hong Kong Restaurant, José’s Mexican Restaurant, Lamplighter Brewing Co.

And many thanks to our generous Symposium sponsors: Alexandria Real Estate, Alnylam Pharmaceuticals, Cambridge Seven Associates, Cambridge Trust Co., Capital One Café, Eastern Bank, North Cambridge Co-Operative Bank, Whole Foods.

## 2017 FALL SYMPOSIUM

As a follow-up to our award-winning 2016 symposia, this fall’s discussions focused on the past, present, and future of Kendall Square and the biotech industry: “Made in Cambridge: What’s Happening in Kendall Square?” October 2: “Why Here?” and October 18: “What’s Next?”



Speakers at the 2017 Fall Symposium highlighted the importance of local civic participation in the 1970s, one of many factors contributing to making the Kendall Square we know today.



September 27: “Apothecary Now.” We were able to peek behind the scenes in the Alnylam labs to see how life-saving drugs are developed, and learn about the global ramifications of drug-testing and pricing.



# From the ARCHIVES

BY MAGGIE HOFFMAN

HELLO EVERYONE! It is my pleasure to greet you as CHS's new archivist. I am a graduate student at Simmons College, where I study Archives Management in the School of Library and Information Science. I'm thrilled to join an institution that has taken such great strides in connecting the past with the present.

During her tenure here, my predecessor Rina Sandler streamlined procedures and thoughtfully redefined policies so that she and future archivists could more effectively uphold the mission of CHS and better serve the public. She also encouraged community involvement by opening the archives to interns and volunteers, an initiative I plan to continue. I am grateful for the significant work Rina accomplished and I'm honored to take the reins from her. I look forward to developing new ways to integrate the Society's rich archival collections into our outreach programming.

The holdings here at the Society are fascinating, and several have already piqued my curiosity. With an interest in photography and women's history, I'm impressed

by the entrepreneurial accomplishments of architect Lois Lilley Howe (see below) and am delighted we house her photographic collection. The Society's Maps and Plans Collection especially appeals to my background in American environmental history. We're hard at work getting those materials into an online gallery, and I can't wait to share them with you!

Above all, I value access. The materials in the Society's archives are more than letters and manuscripts; they are evidence of this community's shared history—your history. Whether or not you come from a long line of Cantabrigians, our collections can highlight how Cambridge's past shapes your life today. I look forward to developing new ways to connect you with that history.

## Volunteers Needed at the CHS

The Society seeks volunteers for approximately eight hours a week for office, database, programs, and some public relations work, such as:

- Updating files in Word and Excel
- Data entry in our database
- Attending and assisting with our programs and events

Our volunteers are vital members of the team and contribute greatly to our success as an organization. If you have an appreciation for the role of history in improving our lives and want to join other dedicated individuals making change in Cambridge, please send along a resumé and a note of interest to [info@cambridgehistory.org](mailto:info@cambridgehistory.org).

## Call for New Council Members

Passionate about local history and sharing the stories of Cambridge? We're seeking new Councilors for our governing board with experience in communications, grantwriting, marketing, and other areas to help us continue our important work in the community. Councilors are volunteers who serve three-year terms and are voted in at the Society's Annual Meeting in February. For more information, please visit [cambridgehistory.org/opportunities/](http://cambridgehistory.org/opportunities/).



Cambridge-born architect Lois Lilley Howe (1864-1964), founder of the first all-female architecture firm in Boston, became president of the Boston Women's Club and the MIT Women's Association. She also served on the Boston Society of Architects Small House Bureau, the AIA Committee on Small Houses, and the Board of Directors of the Housing Association of Metropolitan Boston. Howe retired in 1937 at age 73. *Courtesy MIT Museum. Photo by Florence Maynard.*





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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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FALL 2017

## CALENDAR of EVENTS



### SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR HOLIDAY PARTY DECEMBER 5!

Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, 159 Brattle Street  
Register at [info@cambridgehistory.org](mailto:info@cambridgehistory.org).

*CHS Opening Conversation and Annual Meeting*  
Monday, February 6, 2018, 4:30 PM  
Cambridge Public Library Main Branch

### JOIN US AS WE KICK OFF OUR 2018 PROGRAMS ON OUR NEW THEME, “WHERE IS CAMBRIDGE FROM?”

The Cambridge Historical Society makes the history  
of our city fun, interesting, and relevant.

In recognition of your support, you will enjoy:

- Subscription to this newsletter
- Discounted admission to our ticketed events and programs
- Invitations to our Annual Meeting, Holiday Party, History Cafés, and other signature events
- Advance notice of limited enrollment programs

*Join this year-long conversation and help keep  
Cambridge curious! For up-to-date information  
about our programs or to make a donation,  
visit [www.cambridgehistory.org](http://www.cambridgehistory.org).*

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