



# City of Cambridge

Calendar Item # 8C  
IN CITY COUNCIL

--April-2,-1990--

April 23, 1990

## ORDERED:

That Union #2 Engine House, 787-789 Main Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on October 5, 1989. The premises so designated are defined as Parcel 9 of Assessors' Map 74.

This designation is justified by the important associations of the building with the broad architectural and social history of the City of Cambridge. Specifically, it is associated with growth of the city's fire department, with the settlement of Cambridgeport, and with the early municipal history of the City. Engine #2 housed one of the city's original three fire companies from 1851 to 1894. Its location, just outside Lafayette Square, is a reminder that Lafayette Square was a center of Cambridgeport settlement in the early 19th century. Engine #2 is now the oldest intact fire station standing in the city and may be the earliest intact city-built structure now surviving.

Architecturally, Engine #2 is important in terms of its period and style of construction and for its associations with Isaac Melvin, a prominent Cambridge builder/architect of the mid 19th century. It is a good example of the Italianate style and is typical of the simple, sturdy, utilitarian structures the city built for its agencies after it incorporated in 1846. Engine #2 is one of eleven structures designed by Melvin to survive in the city and the only intact brick structure of his design still standing.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated landmark area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of Union #2 Engine House, that would in either case be visible from a public way, without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the landmark designation report, and by section VII, Standards for Design Review, and by the applicable sections of Ordinance 1002.

In City Council April 23, 1990.

Adopted by a yea and nay vote:-

Yeas 8; Nays 0; Absent 1.

Attest:- Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

*Joseph E. Connarton*

Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

# City of Cambridge

MASSACHUSETTS

Agenda # 4 - Historical designation -  
The Union # 2 Engine House  
787 - 789 Main Street

In City Council April 2

199 0

|                            | YEA | NAY | ABSENT | PRESENT |  |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|--------|---------|--|
| Mr. Ed Cyr                 | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Francis H. Duehay      | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Jonathan S. Myers      | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Kenneth E. Reeves      | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mrs. Sheila T. Russell     | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Walter J. Sullivan     |     |     | ✓      |         |  |
| Mr. Timothy J. Toomey, Jr. | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. William H. Walsh       | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mayor Alice K. Wolf        | ✓   |     |        |         |  |

8

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## VIII. Proposed Order

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UNION #2 ENGINE HOUSE  
787-789 MAIN STREET

LANDMARK DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT  
PREPARED BY SARAH ZIMMERMAN  
CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
AUGUST 14, 1989

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Union #2 Engine House is significant as the oldest intact fire station in the city. Built in the Italianate style, it is a good example of the simple but sturdy buildings the city constructed for its first municipal institutions. Historically, Engine #2 is associated with the Union #2 fire company, one of the city's original three fire companies, established in 1832, and with the settlement and growth of the Cambridgeport neighborhood.

## I. Location and Economic Status

### A. Address

Union #2 Engine House is located at 787-789 Main Street in the Cambridgeport section of the city. It occupies parcel 9 of assessors' map 74, a lot of 9,900 square feet with dimensions of 34 feet x 93 feet. Sited with its narrow end toward Main Street, the property is zoned Business A (BA), allowing for a floor area ratio (FAR) of 1.0 and a maximum height of 35 feet. Business, neighborhood retail, and office uses are allowed; residential uses are governed as per Residence C-2 zoning. C-2 would allow for multiple-family uses with an FAR of 1.75 and a maximum height of 85 feet.

### B. Ownership and Occupancy

The Christian Mission Holiness Church is the present owner of the structure. This religious society purchased the property on December 8, 1916 (book 4107, page 430) and has owned and occupied the building ever since. It has been used since that time as a sanctuary for the church's worship.

### C. Area Description

Engine #2 stands in an area characterized by a variety of uses and building types. The north side of Main Street and Bishop Allen Drive are zoned Business A, and a mix of retail buildings, including restaurants, a night club, small businesses and parking lots, are interspersed with a few remaining residential structures. Opposite on Main Street is an Industrial B zone, with large reinforced concrete factories of the early 20th century lining much of the south side of the street. At Main and Windsor Streets are the Newtowne Court apartments, a brick public housing complex constructed 1936-38. Just west of the engine house, at Lafayette Square, is the Central Square Business B zone, with three-, four- and five-story commercial buildings. Vacant lots, now used for parking, punctuate the blocks between Windsor and Columbia Streets. North of the engine house are the remaining blocks of a small-scale early to mid-19th-century neighborhood of vernacular frame workers' houses, the remnant of the earliest-settled portion of Cambridgeport. To the south is a large tract of cleared land slated for the University Park research and development complex.

### D. Planning Issues

There are two major issues that are likely to have an impact on the engine house. The first is the ongoing redevelopment of the Main Street-Massachusetts Avenue

corridor, of which the University Park development is a part. The second is the implementation of the Central Square Action Plan (adopted in 1989). The centerpiece of the plan is the Central Square Overlay District, a zoning ordinance that shapes development along Massachusetts Avenue by imposing height and FAR limits, restricting non-pedestrian and entertainment uses, establishing a special permit review process for large or exceptional projects, and creating a citizens' advisory group to review special permits and variances.

The first process is an ongoing, market-driven trend toward higher density commercial development along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor. Pressure for new office and residential space is radiating out along the avenue and Main Street from Harvard and Kendall Squares, threatening to create canyons of high-rise construction. While this process has slowed somewhat, the University Park development, for example, which covers an extensive site and includes hotel, retail and residential space in addition to R&D construction, is likely to spur further development interest in its surroundings. At the least, the University Park complex will represent a shift away from the haphazard mix of buildings in the area and encourage a more uniform and corporate atmosphere.

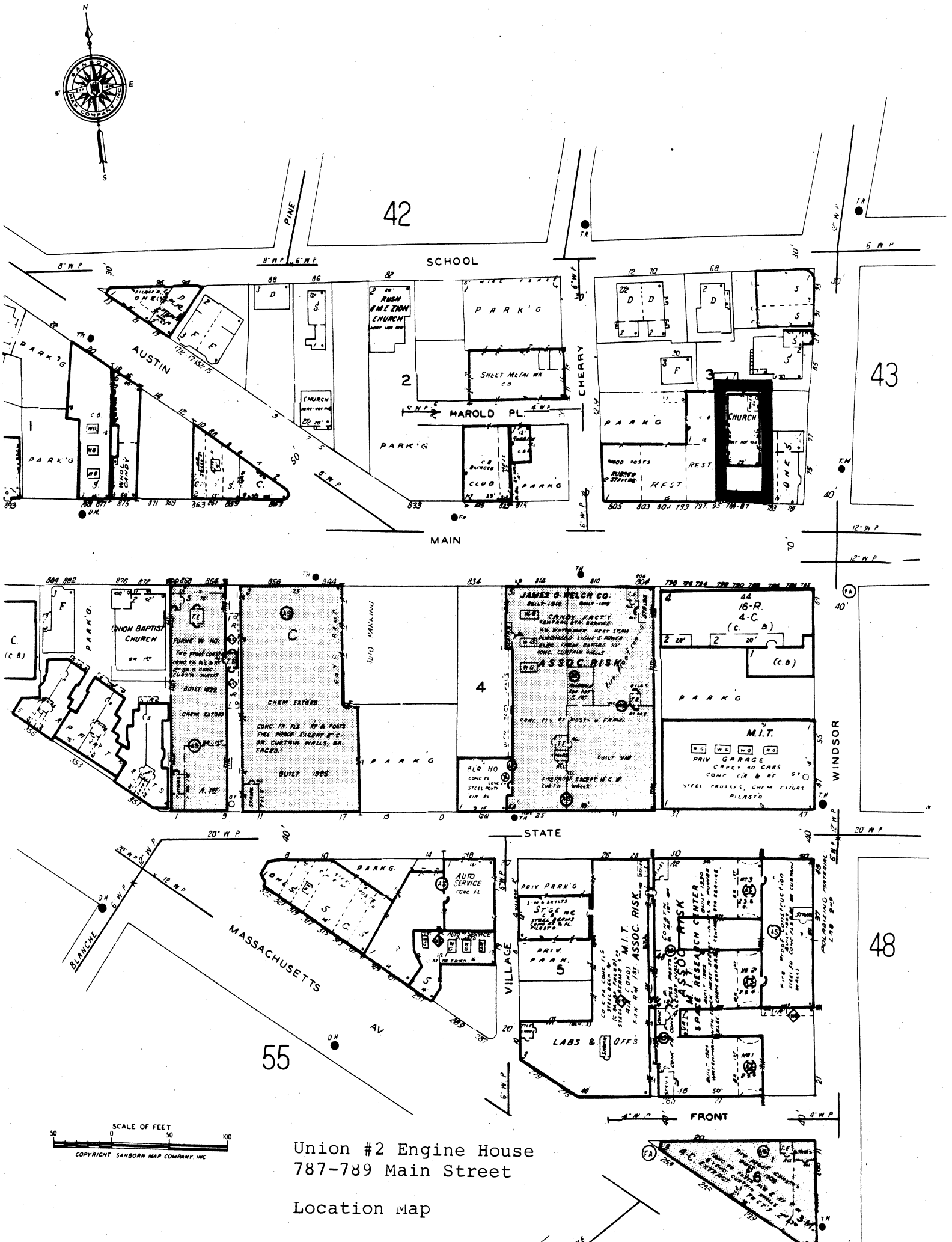
The Central Square Action Plan, which covers the south side of Main Street opposite the engine house, will have the effect of stabilizing and directing future activity in Central Square. Specific goals for the section of Central Square adjacent to the engine house (identified as the Central to MIT District) include encouraging retail frontage along Main Street, developing additional mixed-income housing on Bishop Allen Drive and improving the pedestrian and retail environment of Lafayette Square.

The Overlay District would impose a 55 foot height limit on Main Street, with additional height to 80 feet allowed by special permit. This could have the effect of overwhelming the smaller-scale buildings on the north side of Main Street. Mitigating this effect would be the preservation of low-rise buildings such as the Hovey Estate rowhouses at 782-798 Main Street and the Bright and Wentworth Buildings at 853-857 and 859-863 Main Street. One of the goals of the Action Plan is to encourage preservation of such structures.

With regard to the specific engine house property, the small size of the lot and the fact that the existing building does not conform to the current setback requirements (it sits directly on its side and rear property lines) make it unlikely that the individual site would be redeveloped. There is a possibility that a larger parcel, consisting of a combination of the three properties at 781-

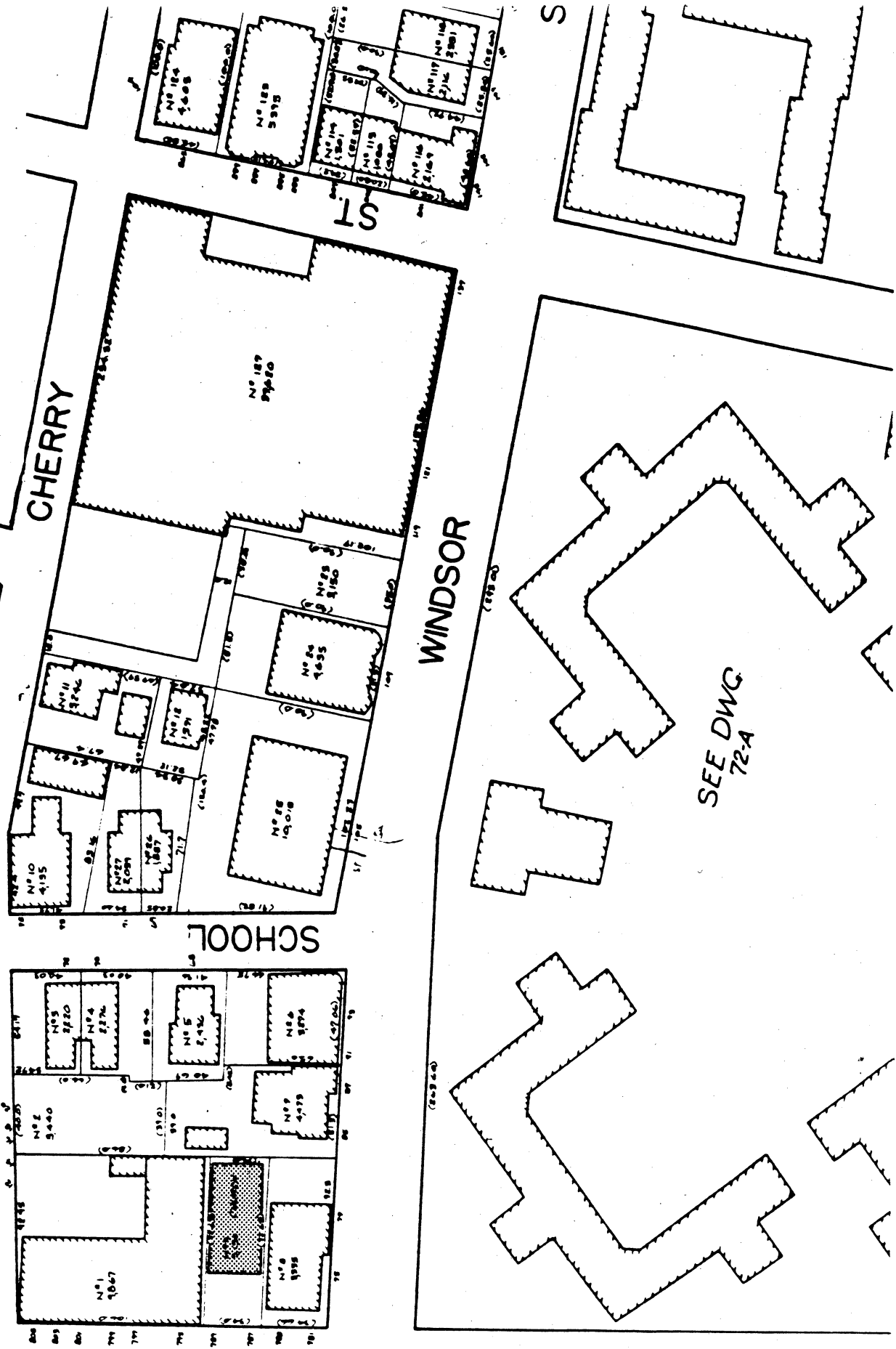
783, 787-789, and 795-805 Main Street, could be assembled for development, if market conditions supported such construction.

E. Map



Union #2 Engine House  
787-789 Main Street

Location map



MAIN ST.

70

Union #2 Engine House  
787-789 Main Street

Assessors' Map

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCALE: 1"=40' NOVEMBER-1977**  
**DIMENSIONS FROM DEED, LAND COURT**  
**OR LAYOUT PLANS ARE IN BRACKETS ( )**  
**LAND COURT MARKED L.C. ALL OTHER**  
**DIMENSIONS ARE MEASURED.**  
**DRAWN BY: AL THOMPSON**

## II. Description

Union #2 Engine House is a two-story brick building, four bays wide by five bays deep, with a gable roof of moderate pitch. Built in 1852 according to plans drawn by Melvin and Young, it is a good example of the vernacular Italianate style of architecture. The building, which is rectangular in plan, is oriented with its narrow gable end toward Main Street and is set back on its lot some twenty feet. The front setback is paved and used for parking. There is no landscaping on the lot.

The facade of the engine house, though altered to accommodate new uses in 1894 and 1918, nonetheless retains ample evidence of its original design. It is organized with two large entry bays on the first floor, each of which is surmounted with two windows on the second floor. The two bays, which retain their granite lintels (now parged with concrete), have been bricked in to create a solid wall. A new entrance with a Georgian style pedimented surround and modern flush doors has been placed off-center in the right-hand entry bay. Five small lights in a cross pattern ornament the doors. A gable-roofed canopy supported on lally columns projects from the entrance.

The windows, which now contain two-over-two aluminum replacement sash but had six-over-six originally, have brownstone lintels and sills. There is a circular window in the gable end, set into a simple brick surround with brownstone keystones. The glazing in that window was replaced with art glass as part of the church renovations. All of the brownstone trim on the facade has been painted; elsewhere, the brownstone is unpainted and shows varying degrees of spalling. The cornice consists of a wide, slightly projecting frieze of five bricks' width topped with a fascia of two brick courses and a dentil course of header brick. There are gable returns at the base of the cornice. An aluminum and glass announcement board for the church, placed on the central pier of the building and to the left of the present entrance, is the only other feature of the facade.

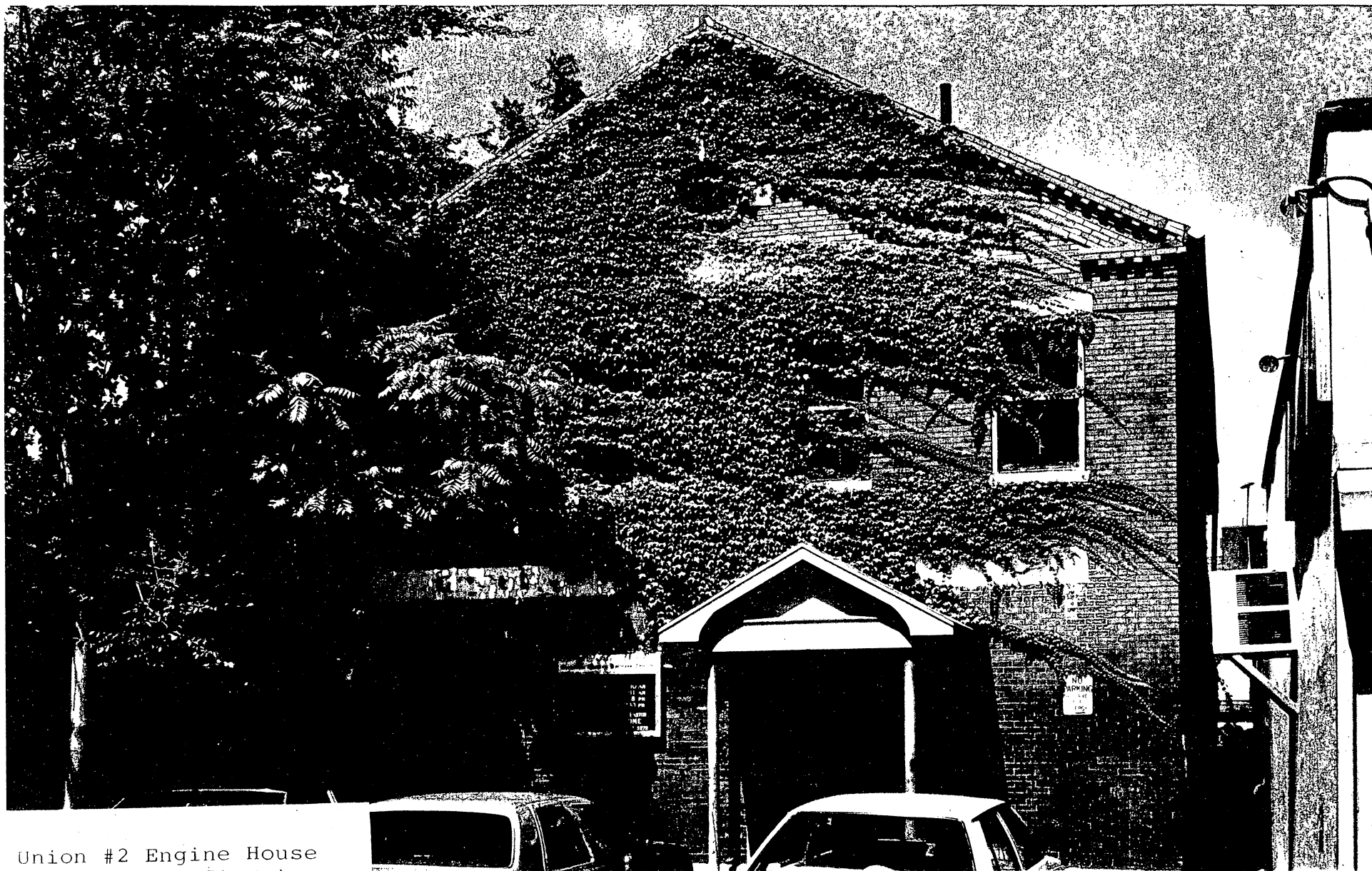
The west elevation is five bays wide and contains eight windows arranged symmetrically on the first and second floors. All of the sash have been replaced with modern one-over-one sash. The first floor windows have been partially bricked up to reduce their size. A door in the fifth (southernmost) bay has been bricked in, but retains its original brownstone lintel. The dentilled cornice of the facade is carried along the eave on this elevation. There is a badly deteriorated chimney at the rear of the building, adjacent to the bricked-in entrance bay.

The east elevation is more asymmetrically arranged. Six bays wide, it appears to have been the location of a hose tower added to the building in 1890 and thus has seen more alteration than the facade or west elevation. The first bay has a window opening on the first story only, the second bay on the second story only. Windows in the next three bays are evenly spaced on both floors. The sixth bay has no window openings and is the location of the hose tower base. The fact that the original dentilled cornice extends across the first five bays and ends at the sixth also corroborates the rebuilding of the last bay for the hose tower. Additional evidence of the changes to this elevation is the presence of tie rods with square and star plates on the back half of the wall. These were probably added to stabilize the structure when the additional weight of the hose tower was added. All the sash on this elevation have been replaced with one-over-ones.

The rear (north) elevation is nearly blank, with a single door at the northeast corner.

Originally, the engine house had a small wooden cupola (presumably to house an alarm bell) at the front of the gable roof. Early photos show the cupola to have been a square open structure with round arches topped with a flaring, hipped roof and a turned finial. A major alteration to upgrade the station was made in 1890 when a hose tower was constructed at the northeast corner of the building. Built of brick and handsomely detailed in the Gothic style, the hose tower must have represented a considerable expense to the city. Extending approximately one story above the roof, the tower featured a corbelled cornice and a round window on the face, corresponding to the circular gable end window on the original building, but at that point, similarities between the 1852 building and the addition ceased. The tower culminated in a flared corbelled cornice surmounted by an open stage with a pyramidal hipped roof supported on chamfered piers. Ornamental cresting completed the design. Presumably, the tower and belfry were removed when the building's use changed, possibly taken down in the alterations of 1918.

Another early feature that has been lost are the names of the companies that were carved into the lintels above the entrances to the engine house. The carvings survived into the early 20th century according to a 1921 Cambridge Chronicle article on the history of the fire department and appear to have been parged over when the Mission Holiness Church took ownership of the building.



Union #2 Engine House  
787-789 Main Street

south facade  
August 1989

### III. History of the Property

The early history of the engine house lot is connected with the first efforts to develop Cambridgeport in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The engine house property stands just at the edge of Pelham's Island, a small area of high ground in the Charles River's tidal marshlands at present-day Lafayette Square. The property came into Leonard Jarvis' possession in the mid-1790s and was part of his efforts, with Judge Francis Dana, to drain the surrounding marshes with dikes and canals, thereby opening the area for development. Jarvis' holdings were seized in 1798 for failure to pay a \$40,000 debt to the U.S. government and were sold at auction in 1801. In 1830, the inhabitants of the town of Cambridge purchased the engine house land from Eliphalet Davis of Cambridge, a soap boiler (book 302, page 307) whose house was located next door to the engine house at the corner of Windsor Street. Two years later, the Union 2 engine house was constructed on the lot for the Cambridge Hook and Ladder Company.

The present brick building, built in 1852, replaced the first, wooden, engine house, which burned ca. 1851. It remained in use as the Engine #2 fire house until 1894, when it was superceded by the present Engine #2, a brick Renaissance Revival station (Condon and Greco, 1893) built at Lafayette Square (378 Massachusetts Avenue). By that point, more up-to-date fire-fighting facilities were needed to protect the burgeoning industries of Cambridgeport and the obsolete 1852 engine house was sold. The building passed in quick succession from Thomas Warren of Cambridge to the Harvard lodge of the International Order of Odd Fellows, which made "general alterations" to the building in 1894. The Harvard lodge sold the property to the Cambridge Benefit Association in 1901, which in turn conveyed the engine house to the Christian Mission Holiness Church in 1916. In 1918, the church made additional alterations to the building, which has remained in their ownership since then.

#### IV. Significance of the Property

##### A. Historical Significance

Historically, the Union #2 Engine House is associated with two processes in the growth of the city: the first is the establishment of organized fire companies in Cambridge and the second is the early development of the city's municipal institutions. The earliest fire companies organized in Cambridge were private societies established for the mutual protection of their members. Beginning in the 1790s, such volunteer brigades began to be organized in Cambridge. In 1803, the "first fully organized fire company in Cambridge" (Lancaster, p. 79) was formed. Owners of Cambridge's first fire engine (a hand-operated water pump), the 1803 society formed the nucleus of what was to become the Cambridge fire department.

The Cambridge Fire Department was formally incorporated by an act of the Great and General Court on March 17, 1832. At that point, the department comprised three hand engine companies of forty men each and one ladder company of twenty-two men. The four original companies were: Cambridge Engine #1, Church Street, Union Engine #2, Main Street, Niagara Engine #3, Cambridge Street, and Franklin Hook and Ladder #1, housed with Engine #2 on Main Street. Hydrant #4 was organized seven years later at Western and River Streets.

The town appears to have undertaken the construction of frame engine houses for each of the companies in 1832, but shortly after the 1846 incorporation of the city, the need for more substantial fire engine houses became apparent. In his first address to city government, Cambridge Mayor James D. Green noted that although two of the city's engine houses were in good repair, the other two (Engine #2 and Engine #4) were not. A new engine house for Engine #4 was proposed and funds were allocated in 1847 for the repair of Engine #2.

Within a few years of incorporation, the city had moved to upgrade all of its old frame fire engine houses. The first engine house built after incorporation was Engine #1, a two-story brick station built in 1847 and demolished in 1922. All of the city's subsequent fire engine houses were constructed of brick, a decision whose validity was proven in 1851, when the 1832 frame Engine #2 burned.

The earliest surviving fire engine house in the city is Niagara Engine #3, built in 1850 and still standing, in much altered condition, at 251 Cambridge Street. Engine #2, constructed in 1851, was the third fire engine house built by the city after incorporation. Engine #4, a station whose design was nearly identical to Engine #1, was constructed in

1852 and demolished in 1910 to make room for the Cambridge Theatre in Central Square.

In 1854, when the first annual report of the Cambridge Fire Department was filed, Engine #2 listed thirty-six members. While the house was in good condition, the company foreman, Albert R. Goodnow, stated that the Howard and Davis engine was in bad condition. He reported the company had "26 feet of suction hose, 450 feet of good leading hose, 150 feet poor, 4 buckets, 2 pikes, 2 axes, 1 crowbar, 1 hose carriage, 1 blunderbuss, in good condition, 1 drag rope, indifferent, and 2 buckets, ordinary." The foreman of the Franklin Hook and Ladder Company #1, Joseph S. Day, reported having sixteen members, a carriage "in good condition; carries 11 ladders of various lengths, 4 hooks with chains and ropes, 5 pike poles, 2 rakes, 2 axes, 1 drag rope; also 12 buckets." Each engine company received \$955 compensation in 1854 and the hook and ladder company, \$845.

The city's three earliest fire companies were formed within the three major villages of early 19th-century Cambridge. The first was located in Old Cambridge, the second in Cambridgeport, and the third in East Cambridge. Their engine houses were constructed at the institutional centers of these communities and reflect the locations of the original settlement areas of the three villages. Engine #2 stands just east of Lafayette Square, where the first church and schoolhouse in Cambridgeport were located. In its location, then, Engine #2 is an important reminder of the early settlement of Cambridgeport.

As settlement expanded, additional fire companies were formed, new stations constructed, and the early engine houses subsumed within the growth of the city. By the turn of the century, all of the early engine houses had ceased to function as such, having been replaced by more modern facilities. As stated earlier, Engine #2 remained in service until 1894.

Engine #2 is now the best-preserved of the city's first generation of municipal structures. Surviving nearly intact, it is a good example of the type of substantial brick structure the city constructed to house its fire department in the first years after incorporation in 1846. In addition, it is second oldest municipal building surviving in the city.

## B. Architectural Significance

The Union #2 Engine House is architecturally significant as a good example of vernacular Italianate architecture, as the work of Melvin and Young, one of the Boston area's first architectural firms, and as a

representative example illustrating the fundamental elements of early fire engine house design.

In the years immediately following incorporation, the City of Cambridge erected a series of brick fire engine houses to accommodate its engine and hook and ladder companies around the city. Between 1847 and 1857, five engine houses were built. These were Engine #1, 23-25 Church Street (1847; enlarged 1864; in service until 1871; demolished 1922); Engine #3, 251 Cambridge Street (1850; in service until 1871; third floor added 1871; first floor altered ca. 1900, 1950); Engine #2, 787-789 Main Street (1851; in service until 1894; altered 1894, 1918); Engine #4, River Street and Western Avenue (1852; in service until 1887; demolished 1910); and Engine #6, Main and Dock Streets (1857; demolished by 1873). The next generation of engine houses was not constructed until the late 1870s.

Architecturally, these early engine houses (excepting Engine #6, whose appearance is unknown) were quite similar in appearance. All were two-story brick structures, rectangular in plan and sited with their narrow ends to the street. With the exception of Engine #2, all housed a single fire company and thus had a single center entrance for the hand- or horse-drawn engine and hose carriage. Because Engine #2 also accommodated the Franklin #1 Hook and Ladder Company, it was a larger structure, with two entrance bays. The second story provided storage space and housing for the fire company members on call.

In terms of style, the engine houses were vernacular Italianate buildings. Built of red brick, the engine houses all had brownstone window trim, typical of mid-century romantic revival design. Engines #1, #2, and #4 all had gable roofs with dentil cornices reminiscent of the bracketted cornices of frame structures. While on engine houses #1 and #3, the cornice extended across the facade forming a pedimented end gable, at engine house #2, the cornice returned only at the eave, in classic Italianate style. Engine #2 also had a small cupola originally, a feature none of the other engine houses seems to have shared. In all cases, the original sash were six-over-six and the lintels were granite, inscribed with the name of the company.

Engine #2 is one of two engine houses for which the architectural firm of Melvin and Young provided plans, the other being Engine #3 on Cambridge Street. The Annual Documents for the year 1852 show that the firm was paid \$50.00 to provide plans for the engine house, which was built by Rufus Lamson, Simon P. Clark, and Spencer and Pollard, all Cambridgeport masons and carpenters. Melvin and Young, or Isaac Melvin practicing alone either as a carpenter, or later as a self-styled architect, were also

responsible for plans for the Otis Street School (1848), as well as numerous residences and other buildings in the city, including the North Avenue Congregational Church (1845). Melvin, whose work in Cambridge spanned a fifteen-year period between 1837 and 1852, worked initially as a carpenter and housewright. But from 1848 to 1852, he is listed in Boston directories as an architect, in practice with Isaiah B. Young.

In addition to his work in Cambridge, Melvin had a fairly extensive practice in Middlesex County and was responsible for the design of several churches, town halls, and schools in the surrounding communities, including Lexington and Arlington. His work is in the Greek Revival and Italianate styles and tends to be emphatic and heavily ornamented, as his own house at 19 Centre Street, a robust Greek Revival mansion, demonstrates. Melvin's work, though generally known in the region, is not well-catalogued and as an early designer, he deserves further study.

### C. Bibliography

#### General Sources

Cambridge Historical Commission. Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge, Report Three, Cambridgeport. Cambridge, 1971.

Dickinson, David T., Jr. "The Cambridge Fire Department, 1846-1921." Article in The Cambridge Chronicle, October 8, 1921.

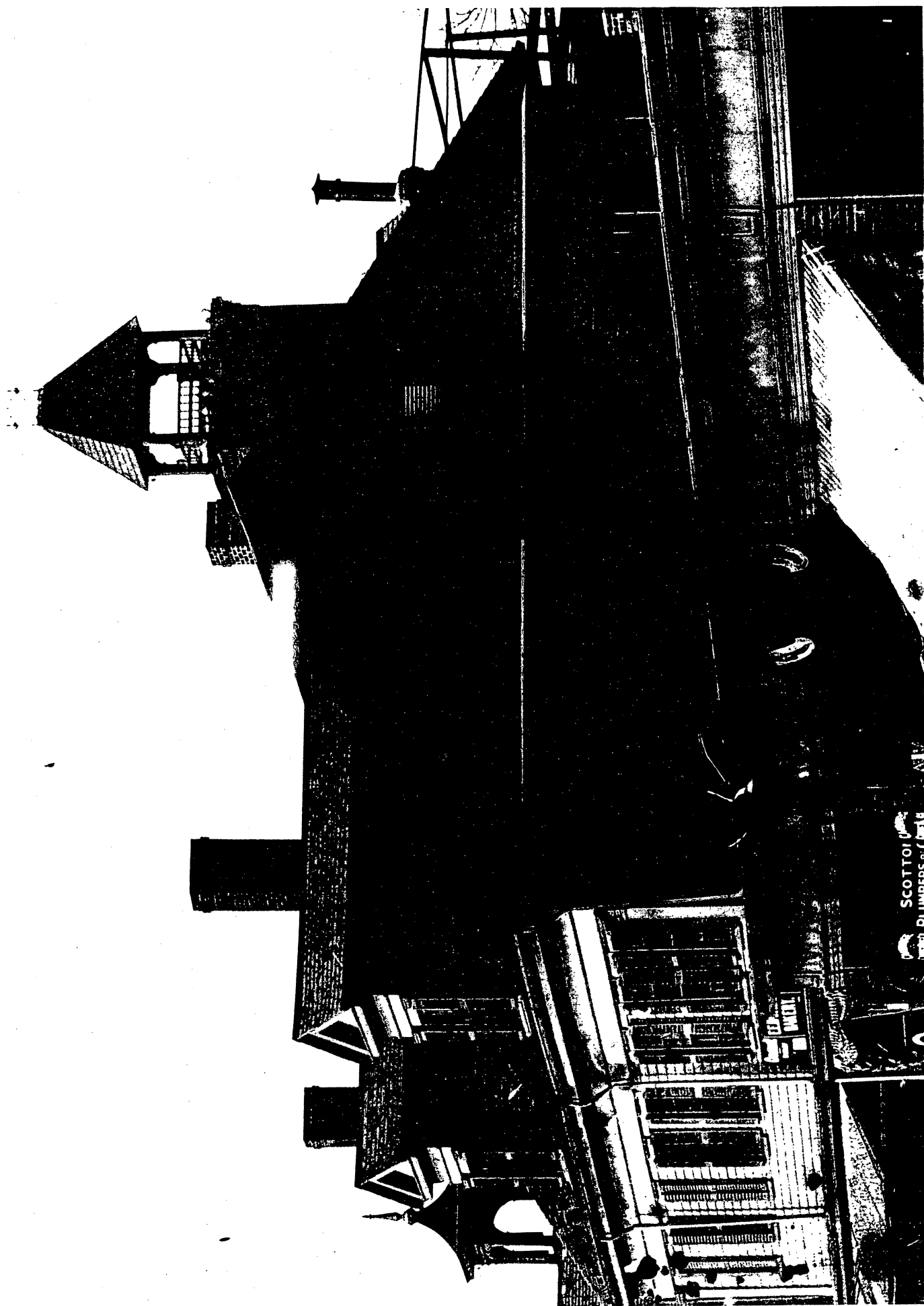
Lancaster, Southworth. "Fire in Cambridge." Cambridge Historical Society Proceedings 36 (1955-56): 75-92.

Massachusetts Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records. Directory of Boston Architects, 1846-1970. Cambridge, 1984.

#### Government Records

Cambridge. Historical Commission. Survey files for 287-289 Main Street; 23-25 Church Street; 251 Cambridge Street.

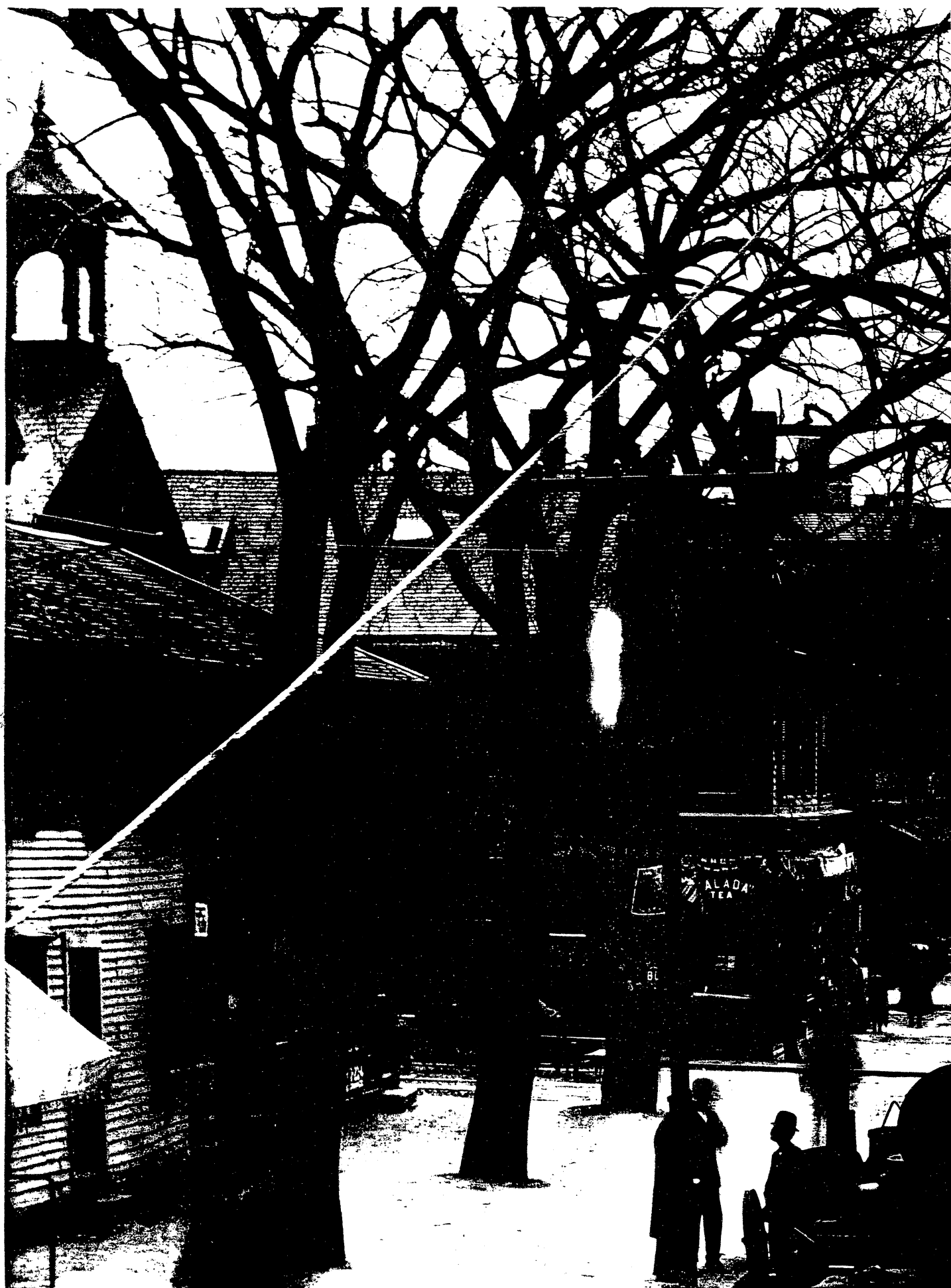
Cambridge. Historical Commission. Index card file of architects and builders practicing in Cambridge. Entries for Isaac Melvin and Melvin and Young.

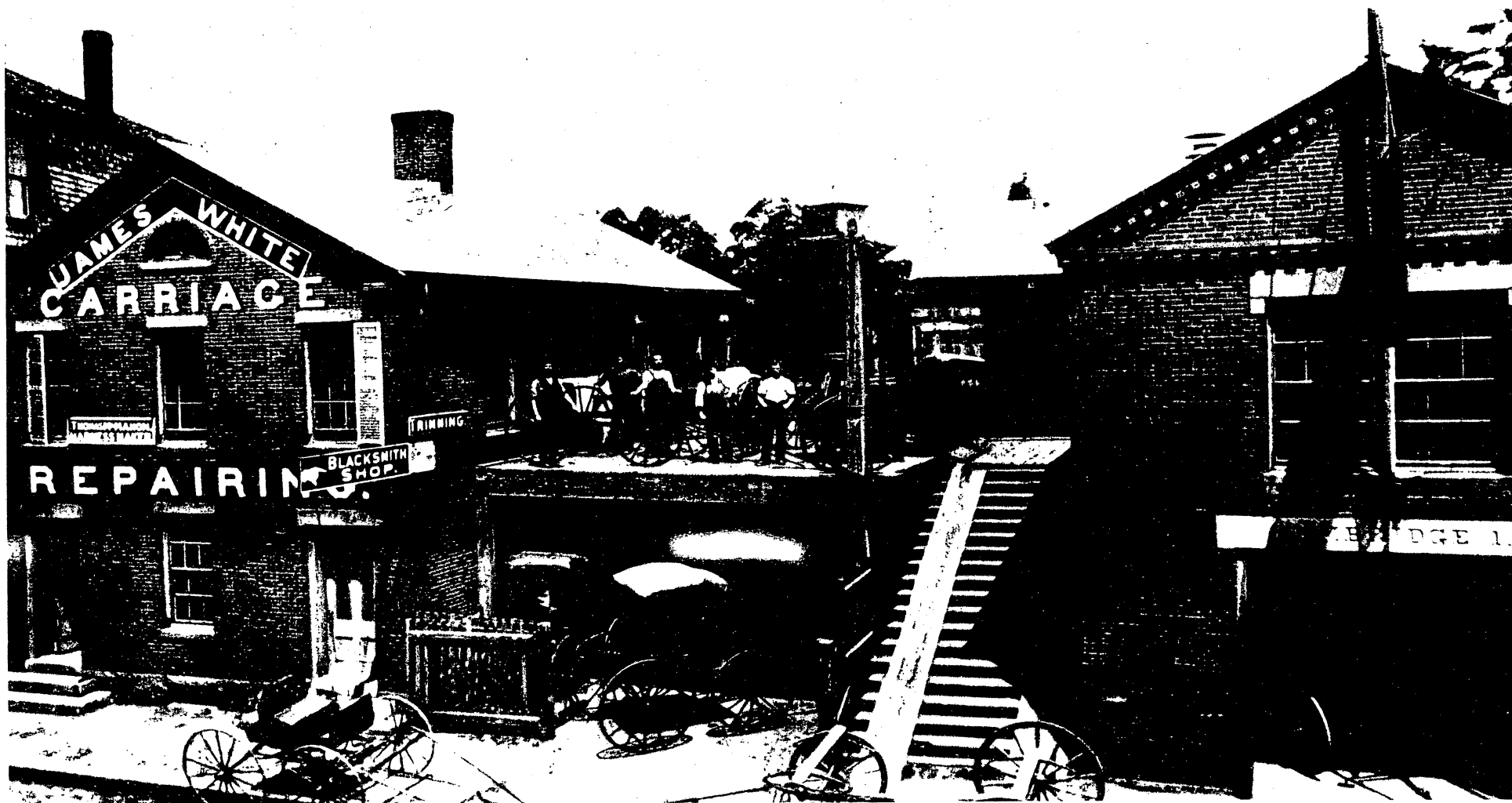




SHEN PROTECTOR 1914

SHEN PROTECTOR 1914

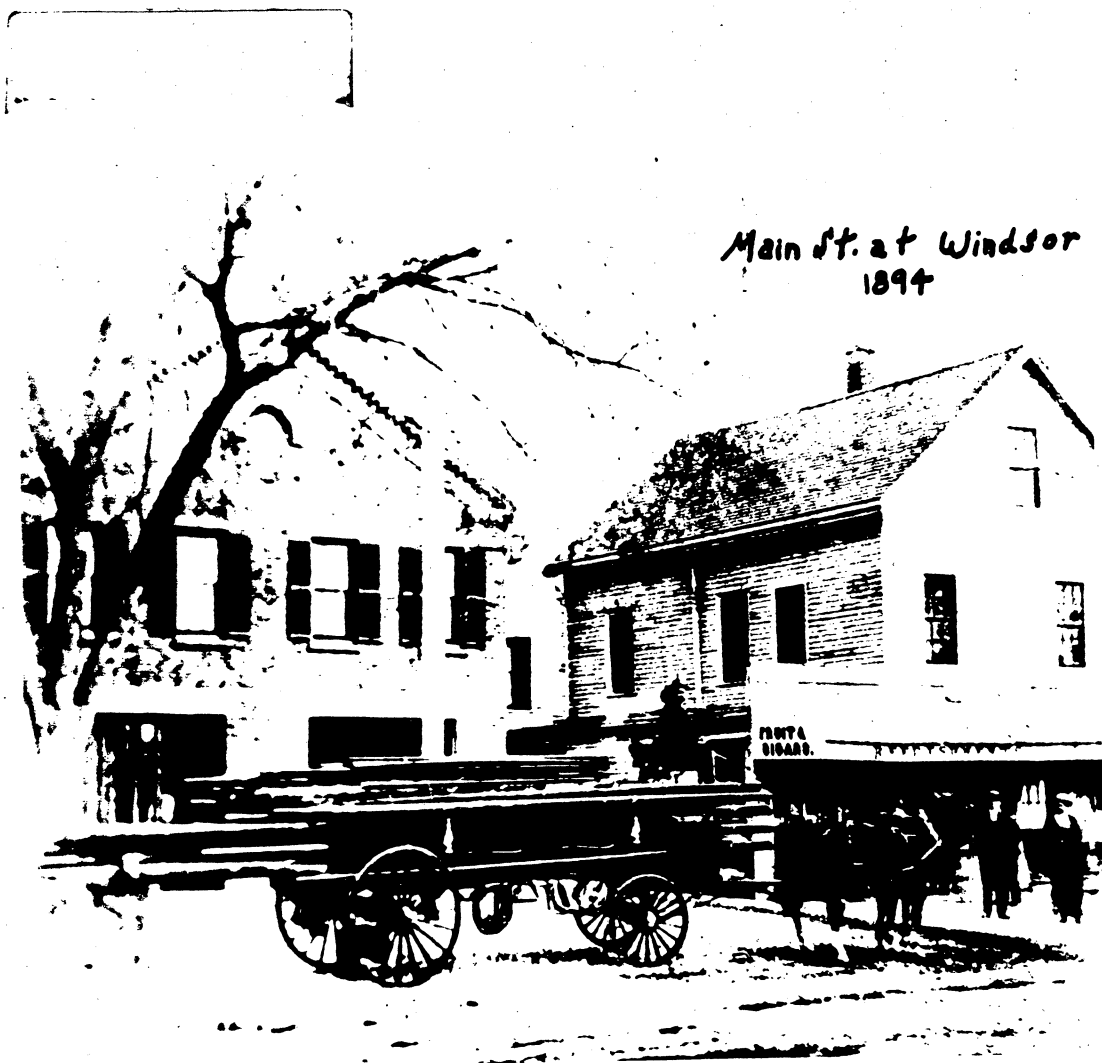




Engine #1 (1847), r.,  
Police Station (1864), l.  
photo, 1890-1893



Engine #3 (1850)  
251 Cambridge Street  
photo, 1989



Union #2 Engine House  
1894

neg. #3332  
Christian Mission Church  
Holiness

## V. Relationship to Criteria

### A. Section 4, Ordinance 1002

Section 4 states the criteria for landmark designation. It states that the Commission:

. . . may recommend for designation as a landmark any . . . structure . . . either (a) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City . . . or (b) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction, or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures.

### B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

Engine House #2 is importantly associated with the broad architectural and social history of the city and is historically and architecturally significant in terms of its period and style of construction and associations with a famous builder/architect.

Under criterion (a), Engine #2 is significant as the oldest intact fire station in the city. When it was built, in 1851, it was the largest of the city's three fire stations. Engine #2 housed two fire companies, Union Engine #2 and Franklin Hook and Ladder #1. Historically, it is also significant as a reflection of the city's early commitment to building sturdy and substantial stations for its fire companies, a commitment that became evident when the city built its first brick fire station in Harvard Square (Engine #1; demolished 1922) in 1847, just one year after incorporation as a city. While a fragment (the second story) of the Engine #3 (East Cambridge) fire house remains, there are no other municipal buildings of the earliest period of the city's history still standing.

The Engine House is also historically significant as it reflects the city's historic development patterns, specifically, the rivalry that grew up in the early 19th century between Old Cambridge, Cambridgeport, and East Cambridge. The original three fire companies for the city were located in each of the three villages and reflect in their presence the autonomy of those three communities in the early 19th century.

It is also important in the social history of the city for its associations with the development of organized fire companies in the city, a process that began with the establishment in 1803 of Cambridge's first fire company.

When the town petitioned the General Court to form the Cambridge Fire Department in 1832, Union Engine #2 was one of the original three companies included. The Engine #2 company survives today in the present Engine #2 fire station at Lafayette Square.

Under criterion (b), Engine #2 is architecturally and historically important as an excellent example of vernacular Italianate design and an intact example of the type of simple but sturdy building the city constructed for the use of its agencies in its first years. It is also architecturally significant as the work of a notable Cambridge builder/architect, Isaac Melvin.

The brick building incorporates simple details of the Italianate style, most notably, a dentilled cornice with gable end returns, a round window with keystones in the gable end, and brownstone trim. The simplicity of the building's rectangular plan and minimal detailing were typical of municipal buildings of the 1840s, '50s, and '60s, and such designs could be adapted to a variety of uses, most notably, police and fire stations and schoolhouses. Engine #2 is the only example of its type surviving in Cambridge.

As a design of Isaac Melvin's, the Engine House is also significant as one of perhaps a half dozen public buildings by Melvin to survive in the Boston area. It is his only known surviving intact brick building, the bulk of his work having been frame construction residences, churches and schools in the Greek Revival and Italianate styles.

## VI. Recommendations

### A. Section 1, Ordinance 1002

The purpose of landmark designation is stated in Section 1 of Ordinance 1002:

. . . to preserve, conserve, and protect the beauty and heritage of the City . . . and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation, and maintenance of . . . structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; [and] to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose.

### B. Preservation Options

There are currently no preservation designations on Engine #2. It appears to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C, for its historic and architectural significance on the local level. If it were to be listed on the National Register, it would be protected from the adverse effects of federally licensed, permitted, or funded projects and, through listing on the parallel State Register of Historic Places, from the adverse effects of state funded, licensed or permitted projects. The National and State Registers provide limited protection from public projects through review by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. However, the Massachusetts Historical Commission's powers do not allow for review of privately-funded projects.

Other options for the preservation of Engine #2 include designation as a Landmark under Ordinance 1002, or placement of a Preservation Easement on the property under the provisions of MGL Chapter 184. The property is now owned by a non-profit religious organization and therefore it is unlikely that a preservation easement would yield any value to the owner. If ownership of the property should change in the future, this option could be re-examined.

The other two major protective designations, a Neighborhood Conservation District or a Local Historic District are not viable for this property since its surrounding context no longer retains architectural continuity or integrity.

### C. Recommendations

It is the staff recommendation that Engine #2 be recommended to the City Council for designation as a protected landmark under ordinance 1002.

## VII. Standards for Design Review

### A. Introduction

The Commission's primary charge under Ordinance 1002 is to review "all construction, demolition, or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features, other than color, of any landmark." This landmark study report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics which led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, those features should be preserved and/or enhanced in any construction, demolition, or alteration of a landmark.

Section 8 of the ordinance sets general guidelines to be considered by the Historical Commission in reviewing changes to landmarks. Among other things, the Commission is directed to consider:

the historic and architectural value and significance of the site or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture and material of the features involved, and the relation of such features to similar features or structures in the surrounding area.

In all cases, a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability must be issued by the Historical Commission prior to making any changes to a landmark. The Commission does not have authority to regulate the interiors of landmarks nor can they control changes to exterior architectural features not subject to public view. Nonetheless, Certificates of Non-Applicability must be issued for those changes. All applications are carefully reviewed by the Commission at a public hearing, in accordance with Ordinance 1002.

### B. General Standards

1. Historic and architectural features of the landmark shall be preserved.
2. Changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have acquired significance in their own right and that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.

5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged.

6. The surface cleaning of a landmark shall be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.

7. New additions must not destroy significant exterior architectural features and shall not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinctive character of the landmark, neighborhood and environment.

8. New additions should be done in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.

#### C. Statement of Standards

##### 1. General

a. Prepare an historic structures report to evaluate the current structural condition of the Engine House, noting particularly the status of the masonry walls, especially at the hose tower location, and brownstone trim, much of which is spalling and in poor condition.

b. Reconstruct original belfry and remove concrete parging from granite entrance lintels, if possible.

##### 2. Exterior Walls

a. Remove virginia creeper which now covers much of the structure and may be contributing to masonry deterioration.

b. Repoint masonry and repair or replace brownstone.

c. Relocate aluminum sign board if possible.

##### 3. Windows

a. Restore six-over-six wooden sash in their original openings on the east and south walls if possible.

### VIII. Proposed Order

#### ORDERED:

That Union #2 Engine House, 787-789 Main Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on \_\_\_\_\_. The premises so designated are defined as Parcel 9 of Assessors' Map 74.

This designation is justified by the important associations of the building with the broad architectural and social history of the City of Cambridge. Specifically, it is associated with growth of the city's fire department, with the settlement of Cambridgeport, and with the early municipal history of the City. Engine #2 housed one of the city's original three fire companies from 1851 to 1894. Its location, just outside Lafayette Square, is a reminder that Lafayette Square was a center of Cambridgeport settlement in the early 19th century. Engine #2 is now the oldest intact fire station standing in the city and may be the earliest intact city-built structure now surviving.

Architecturally, Engine #2 is important in terms of its period and style of construction and for its associations with Isaac Melvin, a prominent Cambridge builder/architect of the mid 19th century. It is a good example of the Italianate style and is typical of the simple, sturdy, utilitarian structures the city built for its agencies after it incorporated in 1846. Engine #2 is one of eleven structures designed by Melvin to survive in the city and the only intact brick structure of his design still standing.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated landmark area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of Union #2 Engine House, that would in either case be visible from a public way, without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the landmark designation report, and by section VII, Standards for Design Review, and by the applicable sections of Ordinance 1002.



# City of Cambridge

Calendar Item # 8B  
IN CITY COUNCIL

--April-2,-1990--

April 23, 1990

**ORDERED:**

That the William Frost House, 10 Frost Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on October 5, 1989. The premises so designated are defined as Parcel 34 of Assessors' Map 153.

This designation is justified by the important associations of the Frost House with the broad architectural and social history of the City of Cambridge. Under criterion (a) of Ordinance 1002, it is the earliest surviving residence in the Agassiz neighborhood of Mid Cambridge and one of the earliest Federal style houses in Cambridge. It is also associated with the Frost family, a large and active family in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Cambridge. Furthermore, as a rare survivor in its neighborhood and with its connections to the Frost family, out of whose property much of the Agassiz neighborhood was subdivided, the house reflects the evolution of Mid Cambridge from open agricultural land to residential suburb. Under criterion (b), the William Frost House is architecturally and historically significant as one of the best-preserved vernacular Federal houses in Cambridge.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated landmark area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of the William Frost House, that would in either case be visible from a public way without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the landmark designation report, and by section VII, Standards for Design Review, and by the applicable sections of Ordinance 1002.

In City Council April 23, 1990.

Adopted by a yeas and nays vote:-

Yeas 8; Nays 0; Absent 1.

Attest:- Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

*Joseph E. Connarton*

Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

# City of Cambridge

MASSACHUSETTS

Agenda # 4 - Historical designation -  
William Frost House - 10  
Frost Street

In City Council April 2

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|                            | YEA | NAY | ABSENT | PRESENT |  |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|--------|---------|--|
| Mr. Ed Cyr                 | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Francis H. Duehay      | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Jonathan S. Myers      | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Kenneth E. Reeves      | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mrs. Sheila T. Russell     | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Walter J. Sullivan     |     |     | ✓      |         |  |
| Mr. Timothy J. Toomey, Jr. | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. William H. Walsh       | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mayor Alice K. Wolf        | ✓   |     |        |         |  |

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### VIII. Proposed Order

#### ORDERED:

That the William Frost House, 10 Frost Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on October 5, 1989. The premises so designated are defined as Parcel 34 of Assessors' Map 153.

This designation is justified by the important associations of the Frost House with the broad architectural and social history of the City of Cambridge. Under criterion (a) of Ordinance 1002, it is the earliest surviving residence in the Agassiz neighborhood of Mid Cambridge and one of the earliest Federal style houses in Cambridge. It is also associated with the Frost family, a large and active family in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Cambridge. Furthermore, as a rare survivor in its neighborhood and with its connections to the Frost family, out of whose property much of the Agassiz neighborhood was subdivided, the house reflects the evolution of Mid Cambridge from open agricultural land to residential suburb. Under criterion (b), the William Frost House is architecturally and historically significant as one of the best-preserved vernacular Federal houses in Cambridge.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated landmark area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of the William Frost House, that would in either case be visible from a public way without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the landmark designation report, and by section VII, Standards for Design Review, and by the applicable sections of Ordinance 1002.

WILLIAM FROST HOUSE  
10 FROST STREET

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT  
PREPARED BY AARON WUNSCH AND SARAH ZIMMERMAN  
CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
JULY 21, 1989

CONTENTS

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The William Frost House (10 Frost Street) is historically and architecturally significant as the earliest surviving house in the Agassiz neighborhood of Mid Cambridge and as one of the earliest Federal style houses in Cambridge. It is associated with the Frost family, a large and active family in 18th and 19th century church and community affairs in Cambridge. The house reflects the evolution of the Agassiz neighborhood from open agricultural land to a mid-19th-century residential suburb. In addition, the Frost House is one of the best-preserved vernacular Federal style houses in the city.

## I. Location

### A. Address and Economic Status

The William Frost House is located at 10 Frost Street on Assessors' Map 153, Parcel 34. It is assessed as a residential use structure, with a valuation of \$193,900 and an additional \$353,800 for the surrounding land. The combined value of the structure and the land is \$547,700.

It stands in a Residential B zone, a two family and townhouse district. Residential B allows conversion of single family to two family houses. The maximum height limit is 35 feet, and the minimum lot area per dwelling unit is 2,500 square feet with an FAR of .5, thus allowing for medium density residential development.

### B. Ownership and Occupancy

The William Frost House is owned by Peter and Mary Jeanne Tufano. It is currently set up for single family use and contains three residential floors.

### C. Area Description

The William Frost House stands near the northern boundary of an area generally known as the Oxford Street or Agassiz District. This area is roughly delineated by Massachusetts Avenue, Beacon, Kirkland and Roseland Streets.

Little of the Agassiz District lay within the town boundary of 1632, and although much more of the area falls inside a second boundary established four years later, the William Frost House at its present location still falls just outside this second boundary. About 1640, the Agassiz District was divided into six acre planting fields and by the end of the century, six or seven small homesteads lined the eastern side of modern-day Massachusetts Avenue. Such small homesteads predominated in the area through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with few mansions appearing along Massachusetts Avenue until the nineteenth century. Because Mid Cambridge lacked the water vital to factories and commerce, industry was deterred and the Agassiz district's residential character was established early. Yet the Agassiz District did not begin to grow into a residential suburb until after the middle of the nineteenth century.

Beginning primarily in the 1860s, residential development in the center of the Agassiz District increased rapidly, while the character of the area changed to the east as Harvard University bought up more and more property and

to the west as Porter Square underwent increasing development. By the twentieth century, the area showed itself to be one of much architectural diversity, more and more encroached upon by Harvard's expansion and by the development of Porter Square, which led to extensive commercial construction during the 1950s.

Within the last twenty years, the area has undergone a substantial degree of gentrification which, while helping to preserve some houses, has also increased the frequency of new construction.

Single and two family houses of the mid to late nineteenth century dominate the area east of Forest Street, while Somerville lies to the north, the residential Avon Hill to the south, and the commercial Porter Square to the west. Three large structures or complexes dominate the blocks of Massachusetts Avenue, Forest, Oxford and Roseland Streets. These are the essentially Greek Revival North Avenue Congregational Church, 1803 Massachusetts Avenue (1845), the Georgian Revival Newport Road apartment complex, 1-7 and 2-8 Newport Road (1916), and the Georgian Revival University Apartments, 17-19a Forest Street (1928). Other large and visually dominant buildings in the area are the Art Deco Sears Roebuck building, 1815 Massachusetts Avenue (1928), and Forest Court, 16-18 Forest Street (1926).

The William Frost house is flanked on the north by 139 Oxford Street, a ca. 1860 single-family mansard house, and 141-151 Oxford Street, a 1910 stuccoed Craftsman/Colonial Revival apartment block; on the west by 6 Frost Street, an 1897 Colonial Revival two-family house (C. Herbert McClare, architect); on the east by 18 Frost Street, a ca. 1860 single-family mansard house; and on the south by 7-17 Frost Street, a 1986 Neo Greek Revival condominium complex consisting of five individual wood frame houses over a 38-car underground parking garage.

#### D. Planning Issues

To date, the William Frost House has undergone few significant changes; currently it stands as an exceptionally well-preserved example of Federal style architecture in Cambridge. In the near future though, the potential for alteration of the site, presently for sale, will increase when the property changes hands. If recent development in the area is an indication of what may occur in years to come, the William Frost House may indeed be in jeopardy. The area is zoned to allow townhouse construction, and beginning in 1986, a group of five townhouses and a 38-car underground parking garage were erected across the street at 7-17 Frost Street. Other recent developments in the area include the 1985 reconstruction and expansion of the Sears Roebuck building at 1815 Massachusetts Avenue into a

combination shopping mall and office building, and the 1987 construction of The Porter Arcade, a two-floor retail building at the corner of Somerville Avenue and White Street.

A potential locus of new development is the two substantial parking lots located at the corners of Massachusetts Avenue and Mount Vernon Street. Proposed plans include the construction of a four- or five-story building along Massachusetts Avenue which would incorporate both residential and retail space. Behind this structure a series of townhouses would be built. As an additional part of this proposal, a parking platform or deck would be built behind the Sears Roebuck building, above and in addition to the existing parking lot.

## II. Description

The William Frost House is a three-story, frame structure built in the Federal style of architecture. Five bays long by two bays wide with a shallow hipped roof, it is oriented with its narrow end facing west toward Frost Street. A two-story ell, two bays long by one bay wide and with a half hipped roof, projects from the east wall. A well-proportioned, one-story Greek Revival veranda with Doric columns wraps around the south and west elevations, shielding the entrance and first floor. Overall, the house is very simply detailed, the strength of its design coming primarily from the clarity of its proportions and its extremely well-preserved materials and workmanship.

In plan, the Frost House is a standard center entry type, with the entrance in the center bay of the south side. There are two chimneys rising on the rear (north) wall, at the second and fourth bays. In addition to the rear ell, there are two minor additions to the body of the house, both one-story sheds with half-hip roofs. One is located between the two chimneys on the rear wall and the other is off of the ell. Though the latter was recently upgraded with a concrete block foundation, both sheds were originally set on posts and were probably added sometime around the middle of the nineteenth century, or perhaps at the time of porch addition. Most recently, a shallow shed-roofed projection for bathroom space was constructed on the rear wall of the main house above the ell.

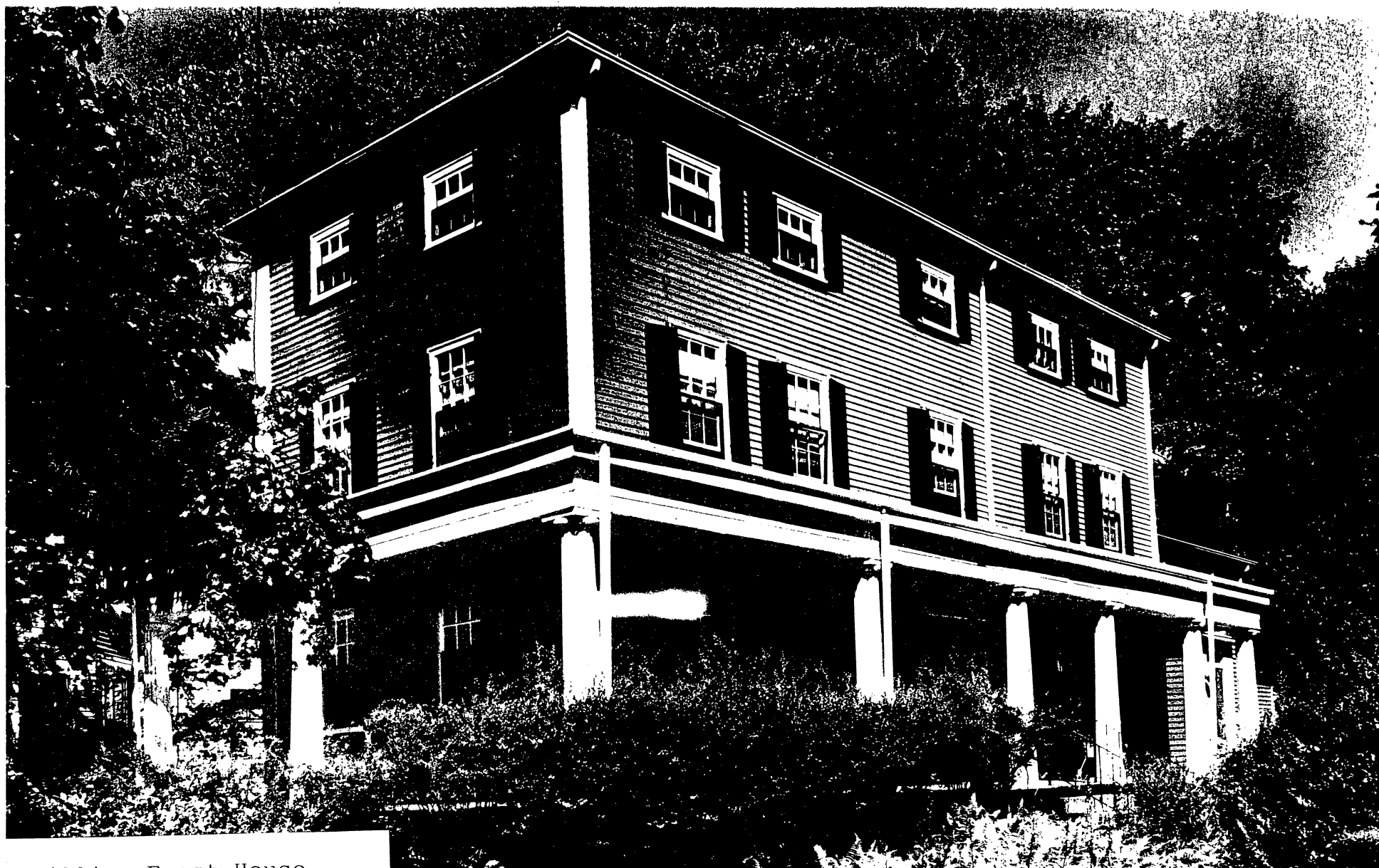
The house has the typical Federal fenestration of foreshortened third floor windows; these contain three-over-three sash, while the remaining sash in the house are six-over-six. There are fixed louver blinds at all the windows. Narrow clapboards with scived joints sheath the house, which is trimmed with plain narrow cornerboards and a simple crown moulded cornice. Approximately 70 percent of the clapboards appear to be original, with the bulk of the replacements on the second and third floors of the south side. The house is set on a terraced rise amidst mature landscaping, including foundation plantings and a perimeter hedge. There is an asphalt-paved driveway along the south side of the property.

The principal facade is the south elevation. The center entrance, gained by a flight of five granite steps, is set into a simple frame with a semi-circular arched fanlight. Flat pilasters support a simple cornice and frieze. The door is a six panel door of the Federal period. There is a second entrance in the center bay of the ell. It is contained within an enclosed gable-roofed porch which appears to date from the same period as the veranda (ca. 1840). The porch features a four-panel door set within a simple frame with wide pilasters and a two-light transom and surmounted by a shallow pediment. The original six-panel

Federal door survives at the back entrance inside the vestibule. All of the doors retain early hardware. The ell contains the same windows and trim as the main house and is contemporaneous with it.

The east (rear) elevation is the least regular in appearance. There are a pair of windows in the rearmost shed and two windows in the main house, one on the second and one on the third floor. The north elevation is also less regular in appearance, with three windows (two on the first floor and one on the second) in the ell, two windows in the main house and two windows in the shed.

Though not a part of this designation, the interior of the Frost House is also well-preserved and substantially intact. The original thin-wall construction is evident in much of the house, the front and rear stairs are intact, and many original six-panel doors remain. The front and rear parlors both retain their original mantels; the front parlor mantel has been augmented with a Colonial Revival style overmantel. Ornamental tiles were added to the fireplace by the present owners.



William Frost House  
10 Frost Street  
south and west elevations  
photo, 1989

### III. History of the Property

#### A. Historic Development Patterns

##### 1. Deed History

Since its construction in 1807, the William Frost House has been moved from its original location at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Roseland Street to its present site at 10 Frost Street. That move, performed in 1867, was undertaken in order to make way for the North Avenue Congregational Church, now on the site.

In its first location, the house occupied a small piece of a much larger plot of land owned originally by Gilbert Crackbone, whose family was among the earliest to settle in Cambridge. This large plot of land was acquired in 1763 by Gideon Frost, who died in 1803 leaving all of it to his son, William, with the exception of one acre which went to his other son, Walter. When Walter left Cambridge in 1807, he conveyed that acre to his brother William and his sister Sarah. At the time that the property changed hands, it contained tanning yards (Walter Frost was a tanner) and an uncompleted structure which was to become the William Frost House.

After the house had been completed, it was lived in by William and Sarah for years to come. When Sarah died in 1821, she left her half of the estate to William's children. At William's death eleven years later, his half of the estate went to his second wife, Mary Teele, who in turn left the piece of property to William's eldest son (her stepson), William Jr., upon her death in 1844. William Jr. had acquired a portion of his aunt Sarah's half of the estate at her death in 1821, and, having received his stepmother's half of the property twenty three years later, he died in 1858 possessing most of the original Gideon Frost holdings. Another part of the estate, owned by William Jr.'s sister Lucy (who lived in New York state), was sold by her to the trustees of William Frost's estate in 1866. This transaction was made in order to create a new location for the William Frost House, which was moved there the next year to make way for the North Avenue Congregational Church.

Since the 1867 move, the William Frost House appears to have been held in several trusts until the turn of the century. After this point, it changed hands several times until 1944, when it was purchased by Donald and Elizabeth Moreland. The house was sold in December, 1989 to the current owners.

##### 2. Development History of the Property

Initially located near the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Roseland Street at 1791 Massachusetts Avenue, the William Frost House was moved in 1867 to make way for the North Avenue Congregational Church. Designed for the Old Cambridge Baptist Church by Isaac Melvin in 1845, the church first stood on the corner of Holmes Place and Kirkland Street, the present site of the Littauer Center. In 1866, having outgrown the church, the Baptists sold it to the Congregationalists in order to raise money for a new building. The Congregationalists moved it to its present site in 1867, adding the transepts and chancel a few years later.

The moving of houses off of Massachusetts Avenue to make way for alternate uses of their sites was not uncommon during the nineteenth century. Although the cleared sites were more often used for commercial rather than residential purposes, both new types of development represent Massachusetts Avenue's move away from its previously residential character. The character of the street to which the William Frost House was moved was soon to change as well. At the time that the house was moved to its new site, it was one of the first, (possibly the first) on the street. By 1873, one year after the street was officially named Frost Street, four other houses had appeared. Between this point and the turn of the century, most of the other houses now on the street were built.

Throughout the early twentieth century, large apartment complexes began to be built more and more frequently in the area. Although such structures were even more common in the neighborhoods west of Massachusetts Avenue, enough of these buildings were erected near Frost Street to affect the character of the area. Typical of such construction are the brick Georgian Revival Forest Court at 16-18 Forest Street (1926), and University Apartments, built across the street (17-19a Forest Street) in an identical style two years later.

The latter half of the twentieth century has produced changes of a different nature in the area surrounding the William Frost House. Within the last twenty-five years, many nearby houses originally designed for single family use have been converted into two-family residences, creating more rental units. An example of such a conversion is 18 Frost Street, an 1860s mansard house next door to the William Frost House. In addition, other houses in the area have been converted for use as condominiums while empty lots have been used for the construction of new condominiums such as those erected at 7-17 Frost Street. Rarer in the area are examples of speculative demolition, which has occurred at a few sites in years past. Yet rare as such demolition has been, it has also been costly to the neighborhood's architecture: in the case of 17 Frost Street, a fine example

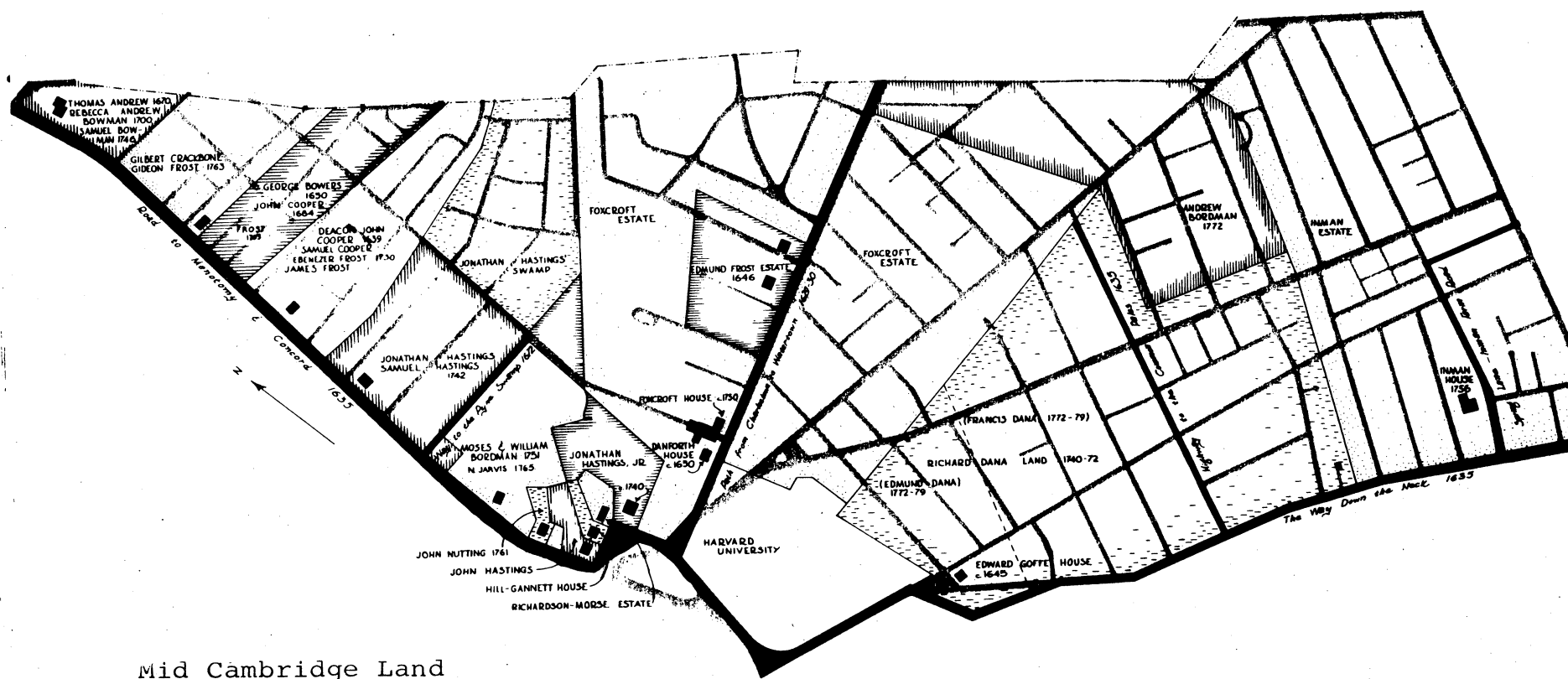
of the late shingle style and an "outstanding house on the street", built in 1886, was demolished in 1967 only to leave a site unused until 1986. While few such drastic changes are likely to take place in the area in the near future, the pattern of converting houses to accommodate more residential units will probably continue, given the history of the surrounding area in recent years.

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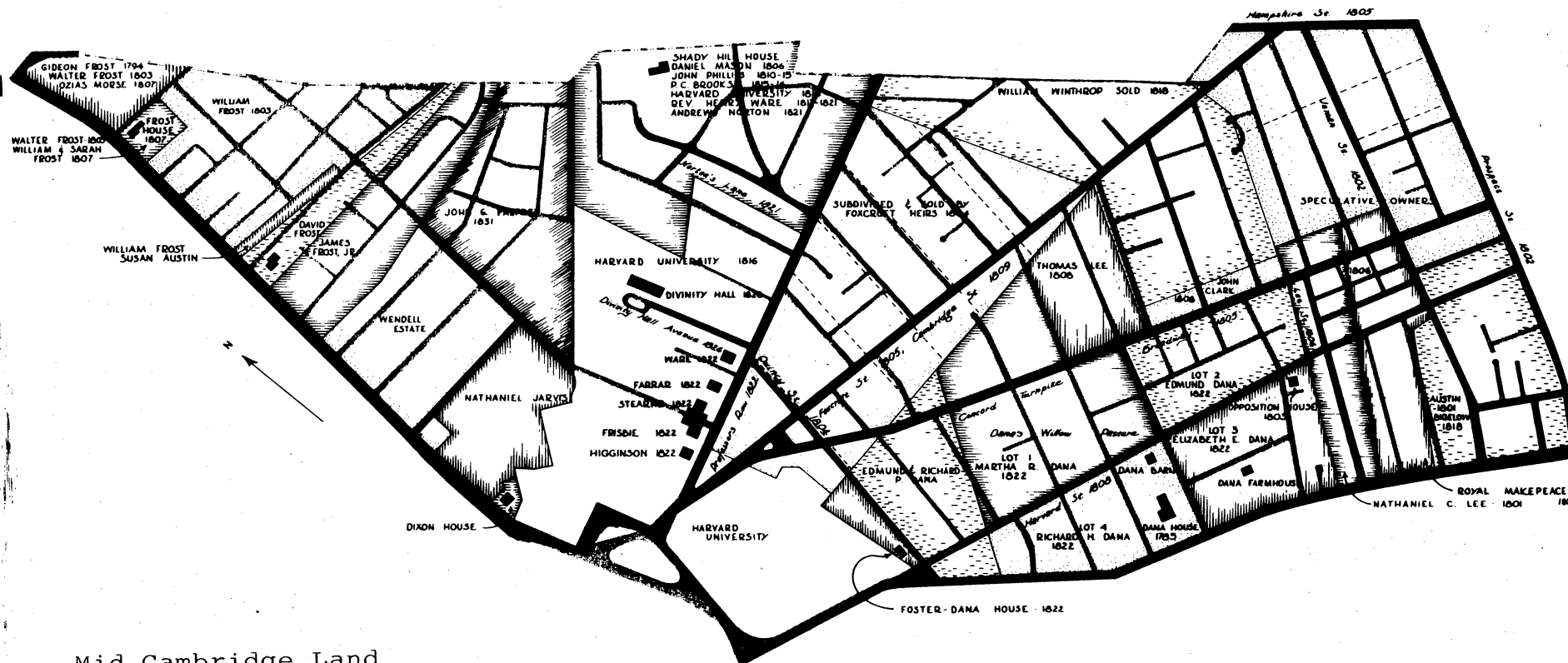
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Mid Cambridge Land  
Holdings before 1775  
Report 2, Mid Cambridge  
(1967)



Mid Cambridge Land  
Holdings in 1830  
Report 2 Mid Cambridge  
(1967)

#### IV. Significance of the Property

##### A. Historical Significance

The historical significance of the William Frost House lies both in the nineteenth-century family that lived in it, and in its relationship to the development of Massachusetts Avenue and its neighborhood.

The Frost family was one of the earliest to become established in Cambridge. The first Frost to arrive was Edmund in 1635. He was never a wealthy man but managed to buy and sell various plots in Cambridge, finally settling down on a site off Kirkland Street in 1646. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Frost family grew and acquired more property. According to the Mid Cambridge survey, the largest piece of land in the area was owned by members of the Frost family, who by the end of the eighteenth century had acquired all of the property north from the Hastings homestead (between Wendell and Mellen Streets) to Porter Square, as well as property on the west side of Massachusetts Avenue (where the Copper-Frost-Austin house stands).

By the end of the eighteenth century, Gideon Frost owned much of this land. Upon his death in 1803, he left all of his holdings to his son, William, with the exception of one acre which he left to another son, Walter. Walter, who lived from 1766 to 1818, was a tanner and established tanning yards on his property at Massachusetts Avenue and Roseland Street. Walter began construction on what became the William Frost House shortly before conveying the property to his brother William and his sister Sarah. Little is known about Sarah other than the facts that she was born in 1754 and died unmarried in 1821. Somewhat more is known about William. He was born in 1774 and married Lucy Adams in 1799. After her death in 1809, he remarried the next year to Mary Teele, who went on to inherit his estate in 1832. He lived in the Cooper-Frost-Austin house until 1807 when he moved to the William Frost House. He seems to have resided there for the rest of his life.

In addition to its associations with a large and prominent family (Paige's history lists well over 100 members of the family), the William Frost House is historically significant for the contribution it makes to an understanding of the development of the Agassiz neighborhood of Mid Cambridge. As the first house built in the neighborhood defined by Sacramento Street, Beacon Street and Massachusetts Avenue, an area owned exclusively by members of the Frost family, the Frost House is an important survivor of the area's initial settlement and a reminder of the Frost family's extensive real estate holdings.

The land was held in two branches of the family, the heirs of Gideon and Ebenezer Frost. The section owned by Ebenezer's heirs (in the area of Garfield and Sacramento Streets) was subdivided in the 1840s but it was not until William Frost's death in 1858 that the remainder of the property began to be broken up for development. The William Frost estate continued to be held in trust for the rest of the century and the final parcels were not developed until around 1900. Thus, the architectural development of upper Oxford, Sacramento, Eustis, Garfield, Crescent, Roseland, Forest, Prentiss, Harris, Traymore and Acadia Streets all relate to the disposition history of Frost property.

The significance of the William Frost House also lies in the way that the house's history reflects the history of Massachusetts Avenue as a whole during the nineteenth century. The earliest structures built along Massachusetts Avenue had been farm houses, and at the time of its construction in 1807, the William Frost House was one of the first in a series of large houses to be built along the avenue throughout the century. It is currently the earliest surviving example of a residence built on Massachusetts Avenue.

The relocation of the house in 1867 was also one of the first in a sequence of many such moves which took place from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries as Massachusetts Avenue moved away from its previously residential nature, for the most part becoming commercial. Other significant houses which were part of this trend include 1 Potter Park, a Greek Revival mansion built ca. 1840 and moved from the avenue in 1883, and 6 Prentiss Street, another Greek Revival house built ca. 1845 and moved from the avenue in 1926. Of these and other relocated houses, the William Frost house was built and moved the earliest.

There are two other properties associated with the Frost family surviving in Cambridge. These are the Cooper-Frost-Austin House (21 Linnaean Street, ca. 1690) and the Elizabeth Frost House (35 Bowdoin Street, 1812).

## B. Architectural Significance

The William Frost House is architecturally significant as one of the best preserved Federal houses in Cambridge. It is also one of a small number of three-story vernacular Federal houses surviving in the city, most of the larger houses of the period being high-style examples, such as Fay House. The Federal period in Cambridge was one of economic stagnation, caused by the economic depression of the Jeffersonian Embargoes and the War of 1812. As a result, there was relatively little construction in early nineteenth

century Cambridge. There are probably something over two dozen Federal houses surviving in Cambridge, nearly all of them in Old Cambridge. Smaller numbers of Federal dwellings survive in East Cambridge and Cambridgeport; however, many of these are one-story cottages.

Architecturally, the Frost House is most directly comparable to two other three-story vernacular Federal houses surviving in the city, 1 Garden Street (1820, William Saunders) and 71 Cherry Street (Margaret Fuller House, 1807). All three houses are built in the standard three-story form for the period, namely, five bays wide by one or two bays deep, with foreshortened third floor windows, a center hall entrance, and shallow hipped roof. All of them employ rear wall chimneys, which the architectural survey of the city has identified as the most common plan type for early nineteenth-century single-family houses in the city.

Construction of the Frost House has been attributed to William Saunders, a prominent housewright associated with the construction of ten houses in Cambridge built between 1816 and 1852. The basis of the attribution rests with the architectural similarities between it and Saunders' own home at 1 Garden Street, now Christ Church Rectory. Saunders, who was born in 1787, would only have been 20 years old at the time of the Frost House construction, and since the earliest known attribution of a house to him is his own house of 1821, it seems unlikely that the 1807 Frost House was built by Saunders. Comparison of the Frost House with the Margaret Fuller House, built in the same year, demonstrates the uniformity of the three-story, rear chimney plan in the Federal period and suggests that, for the vernacular form, such a simple design could have been built by any master carpenter working in the period.

The Frost House is remarkably simple in its execution. There is little or no applied ornament on the exterior: the entrance is framed with the simplest of flat pilasters; the semi-circular fanlight is of wood with a simple four-light configuration; and the only detailing at the cornice is a simple ogee moulding. And yet, the strength of the rectilinear proportions of the house and fenestration, its well-preserved materials (in particular, the narrow clapboards, six-over-six windows and their casings and blinds, and the Doric veranda), and excellent state of maintenance distinguish the Frost House and make it an excellent example of its style.



William Frost House  
10 Frost Street  
photo, 1967

## V. Relationship to Criteria

### A. Section 4, Ordinance 1002

Section 4 states the criteria for landmark designation.

It states that the Commission:

. . . may recommend for designation as a landmark any . . . structure . . . either (a) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City . . . or (b) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction, or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures.

### B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

The Frost House meets criteria (a) and (b) of Ordinance 1002 for its important associations with the broad architectural and social history of the City and for its historic and architectural significance in terms of its period, style, and method of construction. The Frost House is the earliest surviving residence in the Agassiz neighborhood and one of the earliest examples of the Federal style of architecture in Cambridge. It is associated with the Frost family, prominent citizens of eighteenth and nineteenth century Cambridge. It reflects the development of the Agassiz area and of north Massachusetts Avenue from open agricultural land to a nineteenth-century residential suburb. Architecturally, the Frost House is significant as one of the best-preserved vernacular Federal style houses in Cambridge.

The Frost House, built in 1807, is the oldest house still standing in the Agassiz section of the city, an area bounded by Massachusetts Avenue, Beacon, and Kirkland Street. It stands on land owned in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by members of the Frost family, owners in 1830 of the largest parcel of land in Mid Cambridge at the time, a tract extending from present-day Sacramento Street northeast to the Somerville boundary. The subdivision and development of the Frost land constitutes the development history of that entire area and thus, the Frost House provides an important link back to the early history of the neighborhood.

The Frost family, descendants of Edmund Frost, who settled in Cambridge in 1635, occupied a prominent place in the social history of pre-industrial Cambridge, serving the community and its institutions in numerous capacities,

including as deacons of the First Church, selectmen, assessors and militiamen.

The William Frost House is important to the city's architectural history as one of the earliest surviving Federal houses in Cambridge. Along with a handful of houses in Cambridgeport (156, 158 Auburn Street, 172 Harvard Street, 59 Brookline Street, 71 Cherry Street), and another half-dozen pre-1810 houses (most of them more grandly constructed) in Old Cambridge, the Frost House represents the earliest phase of construction in the Federal style in the city.

In terms of its materials and workmanship, the Frost House is one of the best-preserved of Cambridge's Federal houses. Though it is a simple and unadorned version of the style, the Frost House nonetheless preserves all of the important features of the style, including its strong, rectilinear geometry, hierarchical arrangement of windows, shallow hipped roof, slender proportions of clapboards and trim, and arched fanlit entry. The house is also distinguished by a generous and well-proportioned Doric style veranda, probably added around 1840.

It is also one of two intact three-story vernacular Federal houses in the city, the other being the Margaret Fuller House, 71 Cherry Street (1807). The Frost House is typical of the city's early nineteenth-century vernacular structures in that it is one room deep by two rooms wide with a center-hall plan and a pair of chimneys on the rear wall. It is thus significant for its style, period and method of construction.

## VI. Recommendations

### A. Section 1, Ordinance 1002

The purpose of landmark designation is stated in Section 1 of Ordinance 1002:

. . . to preserve, conserve, and protect the beauty and heritage of the City . . . and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation, and maintenance of . . . structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; [and] to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose.

### B. Preservation Options

The William Frost House is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is protected from the adverse effects of federally licensed, permitted, or funded projects and, through listing on the parallel State Register of Historic Places, from the adverse effects of state funded projects. At the local level, it is covered by the provisions of the city's zoning code.

The National and State Registers provide limited protection from public projects through review by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The zoning provisions establish maximum density and height standards and govern the allowable uses of the property. However, the Massachusetts Historical Commission's powers do not allow for review of privately-funded projects, nor can the zoning code address any issues of building appearance. In neither case can the retention of a particular property be mandated.

Other options for the preservation of the William Frost House include designation as a landmark under Ordinance 1002, placement of a preservation easement on the property under the provisions of MGL Chapter 184, designation within a neighborhood conservation district under Ordinance 1002, or designation within a local historic district under MGL Chapter 40C. The latter two options would depend on neighborhood-generated efforts to regulate the nature of architectural change in the area since the Commission, as a matter of policy, does not generally initiate district studies in the absence of community interest. At present, there is no movement from the neighborhood to study either the neighborhood conservation or local historic district option.

The present owner could place a preservation easement on the property, thereby granting the Commission review over exterior alterations as a condition of the deed. As the

property is currently on the market, it is possible that a preservation easement might not be executed with the current owner prior to the sale of the property. Designation of the Frost House as a landmark can be initiated by the Cambridge Historical Commission and can proceed regardless of the ownership status of the property or the climate for preservation districts in the neighborhood. Landmark designation also provides the greatest measure of protection for the property from public and private actions, since designation as a landmark carries with it listing on the State Register of Historic Places and affords the Cambridge Historical Commission and the public the ability to review exterior alterations by private individuals.

C. It is the staff recommendation that the William Frost House be recommended to the City Council for landmark designation.

## VII. Standards for Design Review

### A. Introduction

The Commission's primary charge under Ordinance 1002 is to review "all construction, demolition, or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features, other than color, of any landmark." This landmark study report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics which led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, those features should be preserved and/or enhanced in any construction, demolition, or alteration of a landmark.

Section 8 of the ordinance sets general guidelines to be considered by the Historical Commission in reviewing changes to landmarks. Among other things, the Commission is directed to consider:

the historic and architectural value and significance of the site or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture and material of the features involved, and the relation of such features to similar features or structures in the surrounding area.

In all cases, a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability must be issued by the Historical Commission prior to making any changes to a landmark. The Commission does not have authority to regulate the interiors of landmarks nor can they control changes to exterior architectural features not subject to public view. Nonetheless, Certificates of Non-Applicability must be issued for those changes. All applications are carefully reviewed by the Commission at a public hearing, in accordance with Ordinance 1002.

### B. General Standards

1. Historic and architectural features of the landmark shall be preserved.
2. Changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have acquired significance in their own right and that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.

5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged.

6. The surface cleaning of a landmark shall be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.

7. New additions must not destroy significant exterior architectural features and shall not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinctive character of the landmark, neighborhood and environment.

8. New additions should be done in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.

#### C. Statement of Standards

##### 1. General

a. Preserve and protect insofar as possible the setting and streetscape views of the Frost House, in particular, the front and side setbacks and landscaping.

##### 2. Exterior Walls

a. Retain clapboards and trim.

b. Remove inappropriate shed-roofed, shingled bathroom addition over rear ell.

##### 3. Windows

a. Retain and repair historic six-over-six and three-over-three sash and casings where these survive, replacing non-original sash with new wooden sash of the same configuration.

b. Retain and repair fixed louver blinds.

##### 4. Roof

a. Maintain existing pitch and design of main roof.

##### 5. Other Elements

a. Repair and retain Doric veranda, granite entry steps, rear porch.

# VIII. Proposed Order

## ORDERED:

That the William Frost House, 10 Frost Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on \_\_\_\_\_. The premises so designated are defined as Parcel 34 of Assessors' Map 153.

This designation is justified by the important associations of the Frost House with the broad architectural and social history of the City of Cambridge. Under criterion (a) of Ordinance 1002, it is the earliest surviving residence in the Agassiz neighborhood of Mid Cambridge and one of the earliest Federal style houses in Cambridge. It is also associated with the Frost family, a large and active family in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Cambridge. Furthermore, as a rare survivor in its neighborhood and with its connections to the Frost family, out of whose property much of the Agassiz neighborhood was subdivided, the house reflects the evolution of Mid Cambridge from open agricultural land to residential suburb. Under criterion (b), the William Frost House is architecturally and historically significant as one of the best-preserved vernacular Federal houses in Cambridge.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated landmark area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of the William Frost House, that would in either case be visible from a public way without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the landmark designation report, and by section VII, Standards for Design Review, and by the applicable sections of Ordinance 1002.



# City of Cambridge

Calendar Item # 8A  
IN CITY COUNCIL

--April-2,-1990-

April 23, 1990

## ORDERED

That the Luke Building, 135-45 Main Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the code of the City of Cambridge; as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on September 7, 1989. The premises so designated are defined as Parcel 26 of Assessors' Map 14.

This designation is justified by the important associations of the building with the architectural and economic history of the City of Cambridge, specifically as the only surviving nineteenth-century commercial building in Kendall Square and as a reflection of the bulk goods trade that characterized the Square's late nineteenth-century economy.

Architecturally, the building is significant as an excellent example of nineteenth-century Italianate commercial construction and one of three surviving brick commercial buildings of its period in the city. Well preserved, with a minimum of alterations, the Luke Building contributes to an understanding of the evolution of the Kendall Square from open marsh land to a thriving commercial center and gateway to Boston.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated landmark area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of the Luke Building, that would in either case be visible from a public way without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall permit the owners to rehabilitate the Luke Building as provided in Section VII, Standards for Design Review, and subject to overall determination by the Commission that final plans for the Luke Building's rehabilitation are not incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, and distinctive character of the landmark.

In City Council April 23, 1990.

Adopted by a yeas and nays vote:-

Yeas 8; Nays 0; Absent 1.

Attest:- Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

*Joseph E. Connarton*  
Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

# City of Cambridge

MASSACHUSETTS

Agenda # 4 - Historical designation -  
The Luke Building - 135-45  
Main Street.

In City Council April 2

1990

|                            | YEA | NAY | ABSENT | PRESENT |  |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|--------|---------|--|
| Mr. Ed Cyr                 | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Francis H. Duehay      | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Jonathan S. Myers      | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Kenneth E. Reeves      | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mrs. Sheila T. Russell     | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. Walter J. Sullivan     |     |     | ✓      |         |  |
| Mr. Timothy J. Toomey, Jr. | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mr. William H. Walsh       | ✓   |     |        |         |  |
| Mayor Alice K. Wolf        | ✓   |     |        |         |  |

8

1

### VIII. Proposed Order

#### ORDERED

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Architecturally, the building is significant as an excellent example of nineteenth-century Italianate commercial construction and one of three surviving brick commercial buildings of its period in the city. Well preserved, with a minimum of alterations, the Luke Building contributes to an understanding of the evolution of the Kendall Square from open marsh land to a thriving commercial center and gateway to Boston.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated landmark area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of the Luke Building, that would in either case be visible from a public way without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall permit the owners to rehabilitate the Luke Building as provided in Section VII, Standards for Design Review, and subject to overall determination by the Commission that final plans for the Luke Building's rehabilitation are not incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, and distinctive character of the landmark.

**LUKE BUILDING  
135-145 MAIN STREET**

Landmark Designation Report  
Prepared by Arthur Bennett  
Cambridge Historical Commission  
July 21, 1989

**CONTENTS**

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The Luke Building is a very well-preserved brick commercial block built in the Italianate style of architecture. Constructed in 1874, it is the earliest surviving building in the Kendall Square section of Cambridge and one of the oldest intact commercial buildings in the city. The Luke Building is an exceptional example of the substantial brick commercial buildings that were built beginning after the Civil War as part of Cambridge's late 19th century industrial and economic expansion. It meets criteria (a) and (b) for its associations with the economic and architectural history of Kendall Square and the city and for the historic and architectural significance of its period, style and method of construction.

## I. Location and Economic Status

### A. Address

The Luke Building is a four story brick structure located at 135-45 Main Street in the Cambridgeport section of the city on parcel 26, assessors map 14. The lot contains 9,179 square feet of land with 90 feet of frontage on the north side of Main Street. The building is currently valued at \$803,400 and the land at \$596,600 for a total valuation of \$1,400,000. It is located just east of Kendall Square in Special Zoning District Three, also known as a Planned Unit Development (PUD-3) Area. The surroundings are primarily high rise office developments.

### B. Ownership and Occupancy

H. J. Davis Development Company currently owns the building. The structure houses restaurants and shops in the ground story storefronts and office and light manufacturing space on the upper three levels. H. J. Davis will rehabilitate the building retaining office and retail uses. They propose to build an addition at the rear of the building and a penthouse and mechanical room on the roof.

### C. Area Description

Located on a small rectangular lot on the north side of Main Street, the Luke Building is bordered to the east and west by the high rise Commonwealth Gas and Saddlebrook Buildings. A parking lot abuts the lot to the north with the Broad Canal beyond.

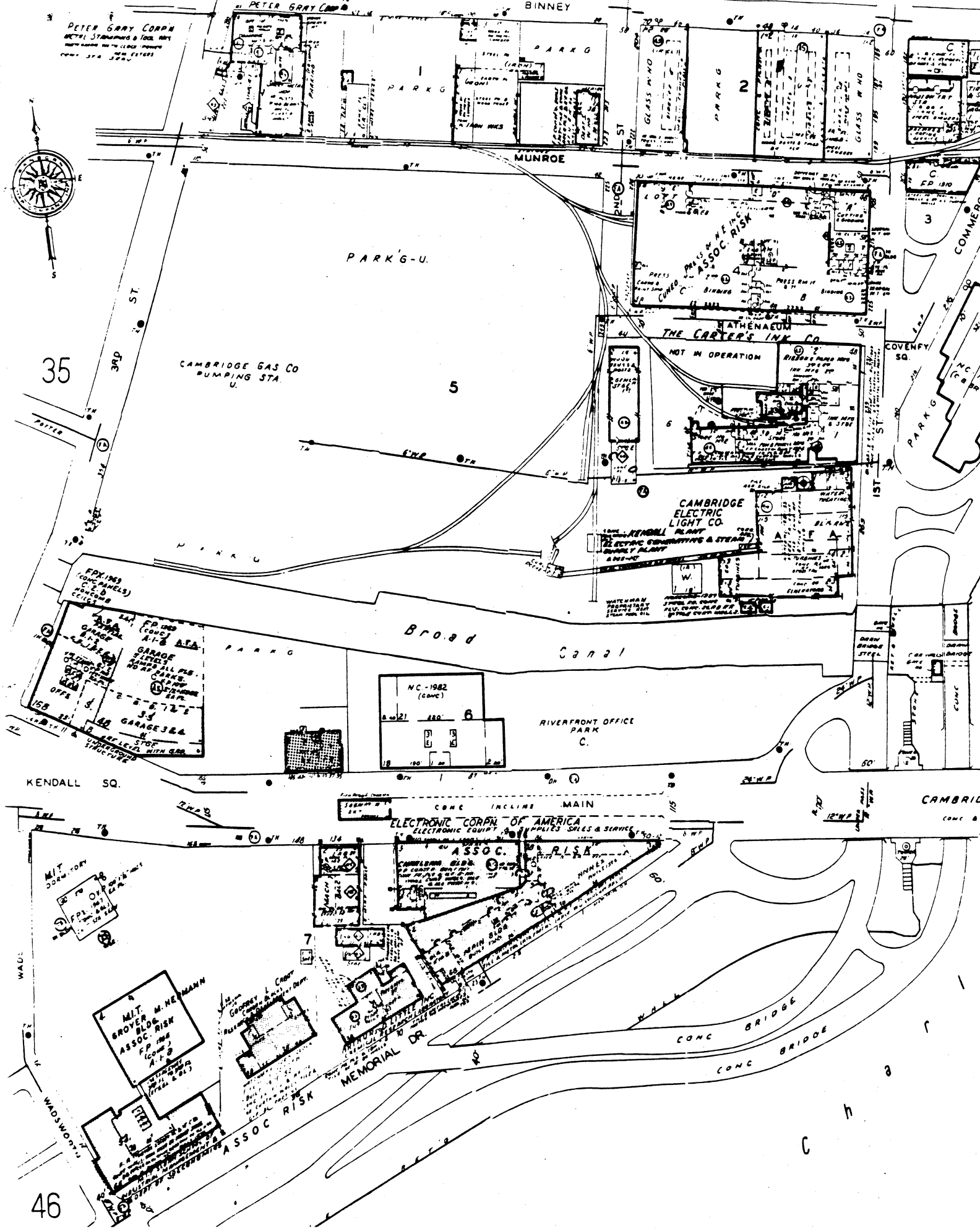
Massive redevelopment of Kendall Square has transformed the area into a prime location for high tech office, research and development, and hotel space. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology owns much of the property on the south side of Main Street and is working with the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) to develop the area.

### D. Planning Issues

The Luke Building stands in an area that has been extensively redeveloped over the past twenty-five years and that will continue to face development in the foreseeable future. Urban renewal cleared a large area of industrial construction north and west of the Luke Building in the 1960s. Vacant for much of the 1970s, the land was developed in the 1980s with offices and hotels. According to the CRA, major construction is and will continue to concentrate in the Kendall Square area on the Main Street corridor.

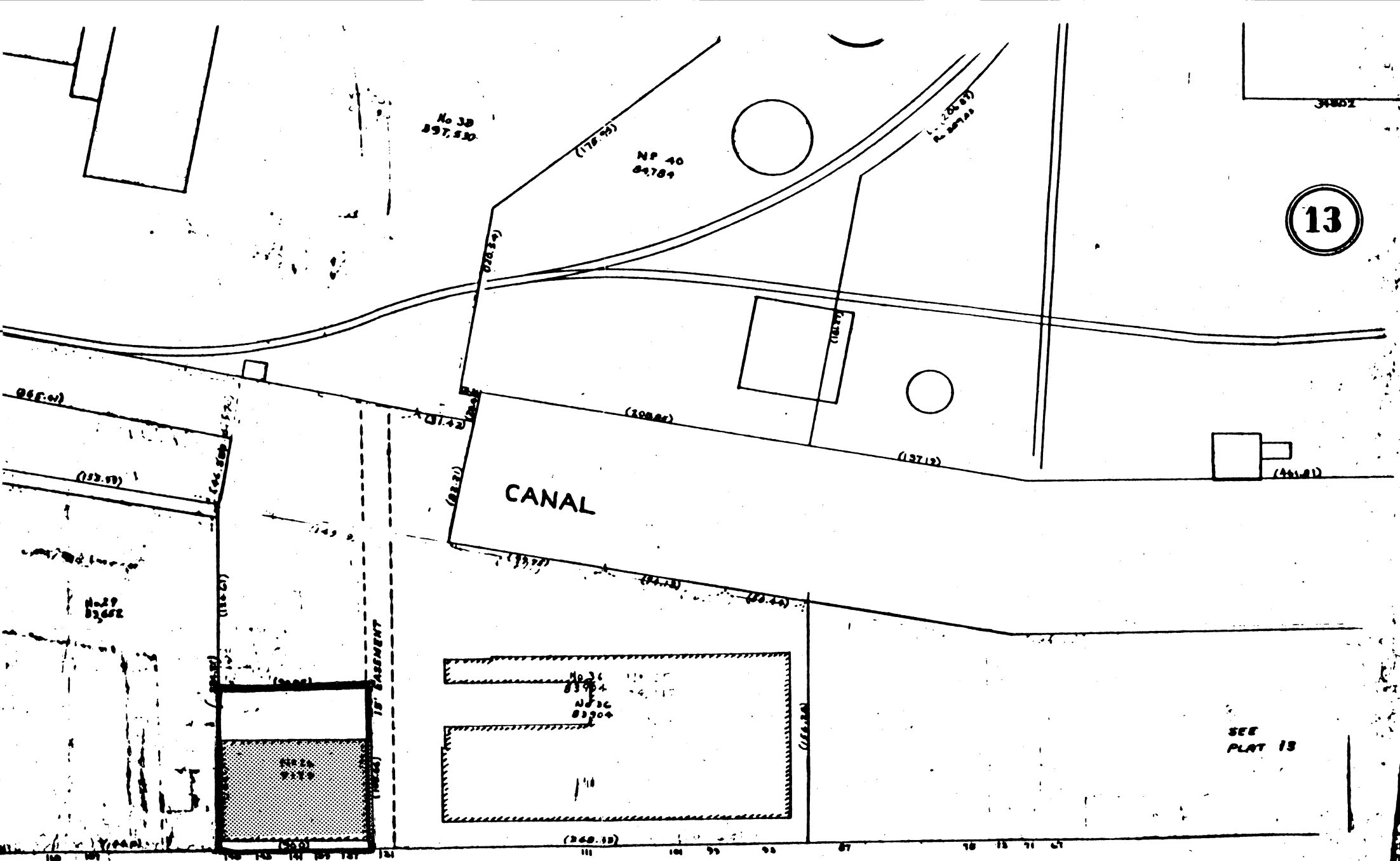
Overall, the impact of these developments on 135-45 Main Street will be to increase the scale of the surrounding neighborhood, add traffic and pedestrian activity, and encourage further new construction. The present owners have presented plans to add two stories and extend the building over its rear parking area. This would entail removing the unsightly billboard presently atop the building.

#### E. Maps



135-145 Main Street  
Luke Building

SCALE OF FEET  
0 50 100 150 200  
COPYRIGHT SANBORN MAP COMPANY, INC.



13

CANAL

SEE  
PLAT 13

135-145 Main Street  
Luke Building  
Assessors' Map  
14, parcel 26

MAIN

ST

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

SCALE 1" = 40' JULY, 1964  
DIMENSIONS FROM DEED, LAND COURT  
OR LAYOUT PLANS ARE IN BRACKETS ( )  
LAND COURT MARKED L.C. - ALL OTHER  
DIMENSIONS ARE MEASURED.

## II. Description

### A. Type and Use

135-45 Main Street is a commercial building originally built to house a hay and grain warehouse. The Luke Building presently houses shops and restaurants at ground level and office and light manufacturing on its upper three stories.

### B. Physical Description

The Luke Building is a four-story, shallow gable-roofed, brick commercial structure built in 1874. Rectangular in plan, the building is twelve bays wide by five bays deep. It was commissioned by Elijah H. Luke to house his hay and grain business, which was located on the same site. The building takes up the full 90 foot frontage of the parcel and extends 60 feet in depth giving 5,400 square feet to each of the four floors. The back of the lot is fenced and used as a parking area and loading dock facility.

The facade contains five storefronts and a passageway to the back of the lot on the ground floor. A course of granite lintels separates the first floor from the upper stories. The storefronts have been altered, reflecting changes in uses and display techniques over the past one hundred years, however, the second storefront from the left appears to have some original detail remaining. The brick piers separating the storefronts appear to have been sandblasted to remove paint and exhibit a slightly pitted surface in comparison to the other bricks on the facade. The bay to the far right is an open passageway to the back of the building which provides access from Main Street. Wrought iron gates once closed the passageway, according to a 1901 photograph. The iron pintles still project from the sides of the passageway where the gates were hung. The opening has granite bumpers protecting its granite piers. There is an overhead loading bay in the passageway which leads to the second floor.

The original features of the facade on the upper floors have, for the most part, remained intact. The windows are mostly original, six over six. A second floor loading bay over the passageway has been converted to a large window. The windows all have limestone sills and projecting arched drip courses of brick above. There are string courses of brick between the second, third, and fourth floors. A namestone, inscribed "LUKE BUILDING," is centered in the string course between the third and fourth floors. The cornice is adorned with brick dentil work.

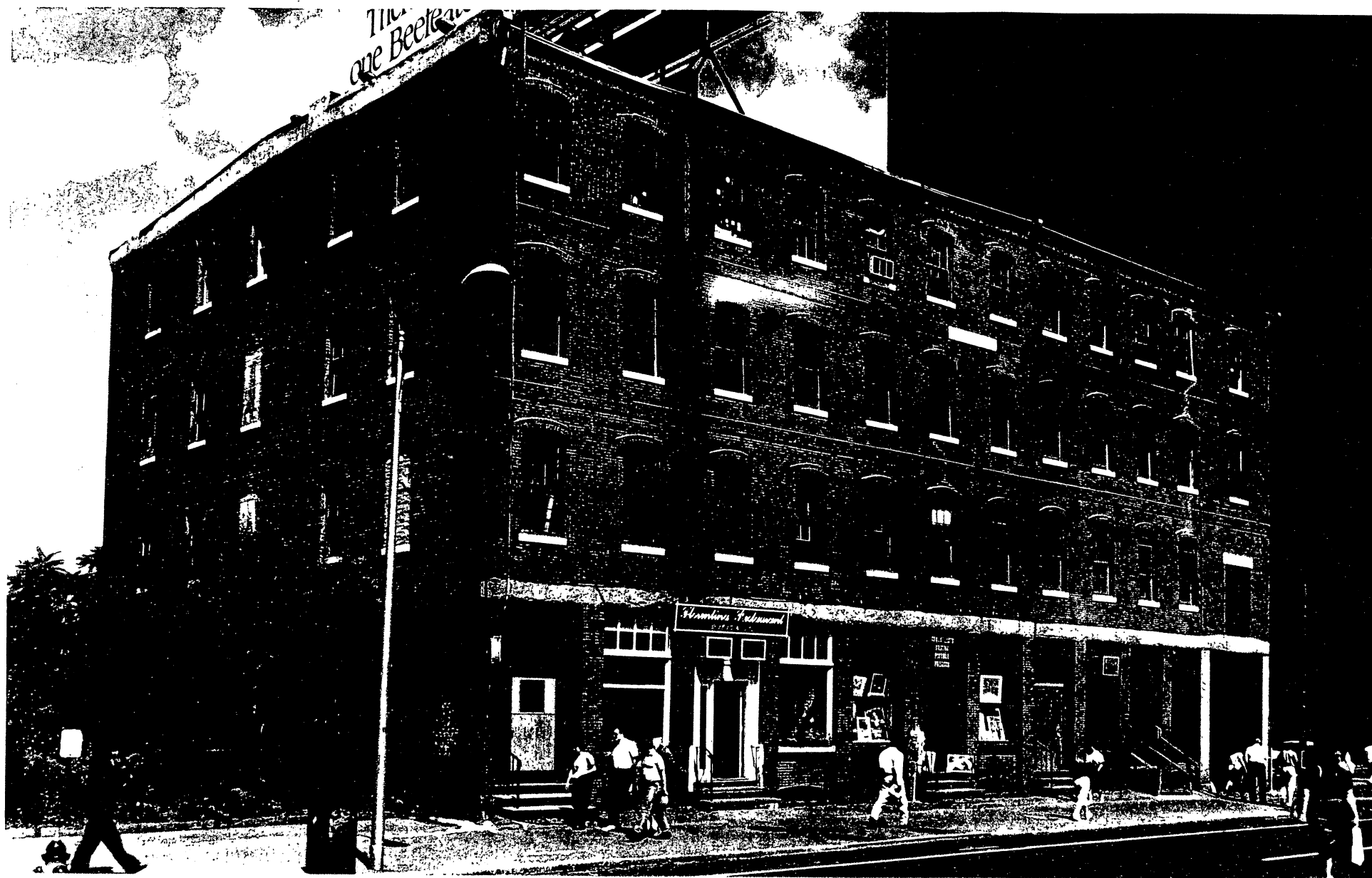
The west elevation was once abutted by a smaller building as evidenced in a 1901 photograph. Most windows on that elevation are original although several have been bricked up. Two chimneys at the roofline of this elevation have been cut down to almost roof level and capped.

The east elevation indicates that the building has settled. Tie rods have been added at least two different times. The tie rods located at the rear of the building between the second, third, and fourth floors were probably added in the early 1900s (they do not appear in the 1901 photo) and are highlighted by star-shaped tie plates. Two other tie rods closer to the facade are plain and were probably added within the last 30 to 40 years. The two chimneys on this elevation have also been cut down and capped. The brick wall is fracturing on some parts of this elevation and probably needs repointing.

The rear elevation has been altered by the addition of a corrugated metal elevator shaft over the third bay from the right and an attached concrete loading platform. Two stacks of loading bays provide access to all floors of the building. These are located over the passageway and in the middle bay. Metal doors cover the loading bay openings. Remnants of pulley systems are evident over the loading bay stacks at roof level. The rear door might be original; what appear to be the original granite steps have been covered by two concrete ones. Iron pintles indicate that metal shutters once existed at the rear windows.

A billboard was erected atop the building (8/8/1959) and still remains. It is an unattractive addition and has stabilizing steel anchors protruding over the facade and rear elevations.

#### C. Current Photographs



### III. History of the Property

#### A. Historic Development Patterns

The Luke Building is located just east of Kendall Square on property that was once surrounded by marsh and wetlands. In the eighteenth century, Cambridgeport was an isolated farming community cut off from Boston by the Charles River mudflats. Much of Cambridgeport was held in three large farms - the Bordman farm, the Soden farm, and the Inman estate. The east end of what is now Main Street was part of Andrew Bordman's holdings.

On Thanksgiving Day 1793, the West Boston Bridge (presently Longfellow Bridge) opened. This event initiated the development of Cambridgeport as a settled area and an important commercial location. The causeway to the bridge (Main Street) became a major transportation route to Boston for inland communities and was responsible for the subsequent development of the area.

The high point of the early history of Cambridgeport occurred in 1805 when the district was named a United States port of entry. Rufus Davenport and Royal Makepeace were influential in launching the seaport idea and by 1803 had assembled large tracts of land by buying up small marsh lots and a large portion of Andrew Bordman's farm. The two entrepreneurs along with three other landowners incorporated as the Cambridgeport Proprietors. The Proprietors established a network of canals for the port and a canal-oriented street building pattern. The plot of land on which the Luke Building was erected was ideally situated between Main Street and Broad Canal with access to both.

Hopes for Cambridgeport as an international seaport were dealt severe blows by the Embargo of 1807-08 and the War of 1812. Land values plummeted and infant commercial ventures faltered. Davenport and Makepeace were financially ruined, their land almost as worthless as the idle canals they had built. The canals that had been dug to accommodate coastal shipping remained to block industrial progress until the 1870s, when they began to be filled in - a process that has continued to the present. Lots that had sold for \$500 to \$1000 at the height of speculation went for \$10 or less.

Following the speculative bust of the early 1800s, Cambridgeport evolved into a Boston-oriented commercial suburb. Much of the local economy depended on commercial traffic passing to and from Boston via the West Boston Bridge. Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue, as the main thoroughfare from the bridge to Old Cambridge and points west, were ideally situated for commercial development. In 1849, 83 out of 100-odd retail shops in Cambridgeport were

located along the Main Street-Massachusetts Avenue corridor; small manufacturing concerns and workshops were also located there. As late as 1865, 80% of the Port's shops and stores were along this strip. It was in this atmosphere of opportunity that Elijah H. Luke established a hay and grain business in the 1840s.

In the 1840s and '50s, attempts were made to exploit the commercial possibilities of the lower port, the district along the causeway and canals. Wharves were built along the causeway near what is now Kendall Square. These wharves were used for bulk goods businesses, such as coal and lumber, and also for manufacturing. Formerly called Dock Square, the junction of Broadway and Main Street became known as Kendall Square, named for Deacon Edward Kendall, founder of a boiler factory located there. The Kendall Square area assumed an increasingly industrial character as its former commercial prominence waned.

In 1867 and 1868, Mr. Luke assembled a parcel of land at the present 135-45 Main Street address. He acquired 19,200 square feet of land through private purchase and public auction (back taxes) to house his already-established hay and grain business. Main Street, the West Boston Bridge, and the existing wharf located on Broad Canal made the parcel a prime location for Luke's business. Luke, also a Cambridge city councilman in 1867-68, prospered at this location and erected the existing brick structure in 1874. The building housed Luke's business office and several other small businesses on the ground floor. The upper three floors provided storage area for hay, grain, and meal. Luke retired in 1892 and passed the business on to his son, Eugene R. Luke.

The business continued to prosper under Eugene's direction until the auto and truck replaced the horse and wagon in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The building remained a valuable rental property for retail and light manufacturing because of its prime location. Eugene sold the structure in 1926 (\$55,000) while partitioning off the back lot bordering Broad Canal (Lots A & B, Book of Plans #385, p.49) from the present parcel on Main Street. The Luke Family regained ownership of the property in 1934 when A. J. Thorner failed to meet a mortgage obligation. The family retained ownership until the 1950s but the building has been bought and sold subsequently on five different occasions. The present owner of the building is the H. J. Davis Development Company.

## B. Bibliography

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Cambridge. Inspectional Services Department. Index card file of building permits, 135-45 Main Street.

Middlesex County. Registry of Deeds. Land records.

Middlesex County. Registry of Deeds. Probate records.

### Maps and Atlases

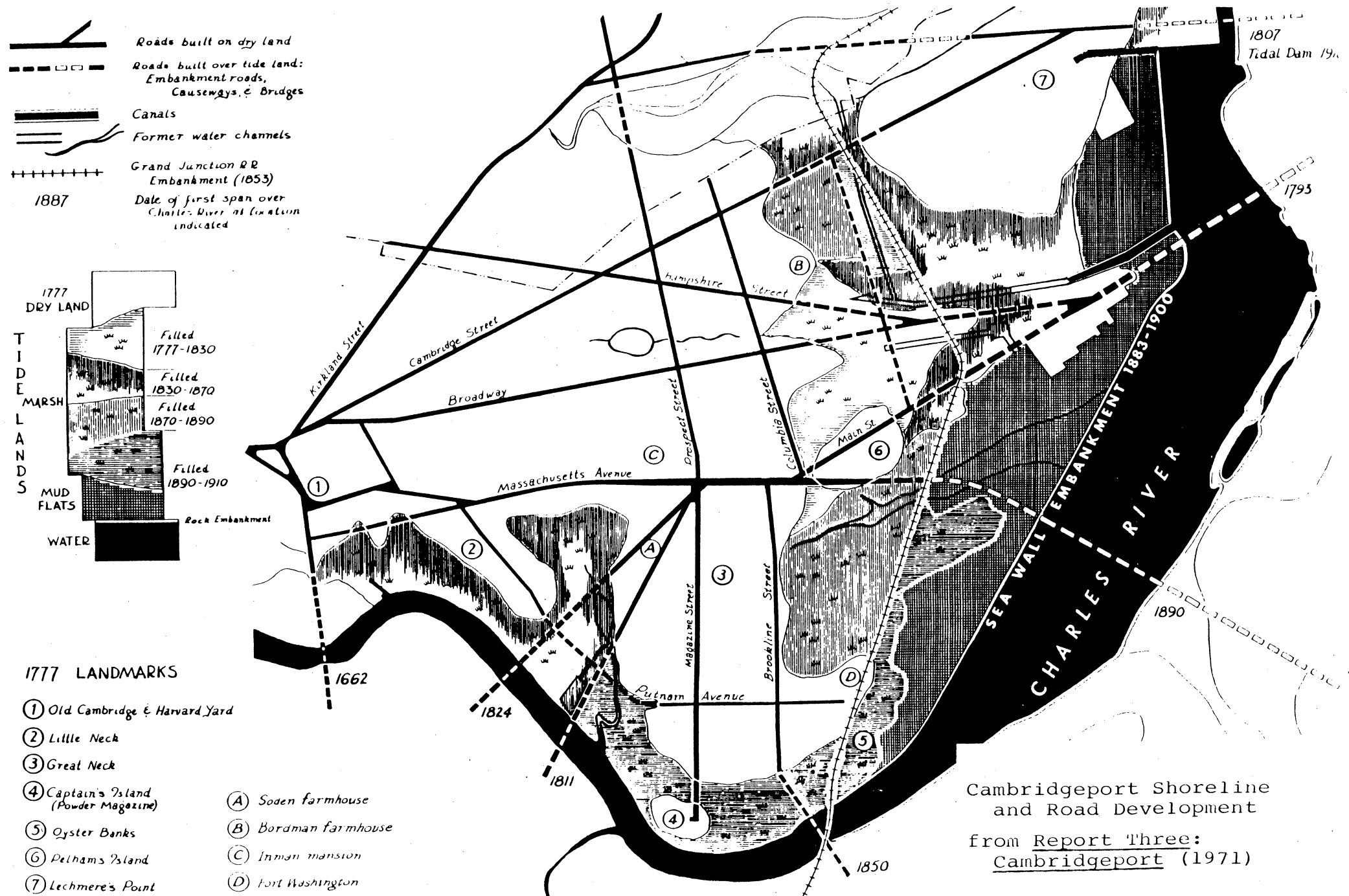
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## C. Historic Photographs, Maps

## 7. CAMBRIDGEPORT SHORELINE AND ROAD DEVELOPMENT



#### IV. Significance of the Property

##### A. Historical Significance

The Luke Building is significant as the only surviving building associated with the late nineteenth century commercial development of Kendall Square and the east end of Main Street. Since the construction of the West Boston Bridge in 1793, Cambridgeport has demonstrated its adaptability to changing economic conditions. The area evolved from marsh land to a United States port of entry, complete with canals, to a thriving nineteenth and twentieth century commercial center featuring trade in bulk goods such as lumber and coal. Today, Kendall Square has undergone another metamorphosis into a modern twentieth century high rise and high technology office center.

The Broad Canal, partially filled and drastically shortened, is the last remnant of the early nineteenth century effort by the Cambridge Proprietors to turn Cambridgeport into a thriving seaport. Similarly, the Luke Building is the last remaining vestige of the canal-related commercial development of the late nineteenth century. Elijah Luke's hay and grain business typified the kind of bulk goods business that was located along the wharves and causeway to Boston.

From the 1870s through the turn of the century, when the damming of the Charles River and subsequent park improvements to the Embankment transformed the river from a transportation route to a recreational area, bulk goods such as coal, lumber, and stone were shipped up river to the Broad Canal and unloaded to the businesses located there. Typical of these businesses were the William H. Wood Lumber Company (112 Main Street), Cambridge Gas Light Company (111-17 Main Street), Charles River Iron Works (152-68 Main Street), Roberts Iron Works (194 Main Street), and Massachusetts Wharf Company (wholesale oils).

The primary historic and architectural significance of the building lies in the fact that it is the only surviving nineteenth century building in Kendall Square. In the last fifteen years, adaptability, changing economic conditions, and proximity to Boston have made Cambridgeport's Kendall Square area a mecca for office space and high technology industries. Through urban renewal and economic redevelopment, the commercial and industrial buildings of turn of the century Kendall Square have nearly all been lost, replaced by modern office buildings on an urban scale. The mix of small one- and two-story frame mid-nineteenth century houses and commercial blocks and later nineteenth-century frame two- to four-story commercial and industrial buildings that once characterized Kendall Square is gone.

The survival of the Luke Building reflects the dynamic social, economic, and developmental history of Kendall Square and provides an important visual link to an earlier time.

The building was also long associated with the Luke family, a prominent family in nineteenth century Cambridge and Cambridgeport. Elijah H. Luke, born 1819, was the founder and owner operator of the hay and grain business for 55 years. He was elected a city councilman in 1867-68 and built a mansard style home, the first house on the block, at 15 Maple Avenue in 1869. The Maple Avenue area was developed by prominent Cantabrigians of the day and presently is listed as a District on the National Register of Historic Places. Upon Elijah's death (May 3, 1898), his son Eugene R. Luke ran the business until the advent of the auto made it obsolete. The building remained in the Luke family as rental property until the mid 1950s.

#### B. Architectural Significance

The Luke Building is significant as the only remaining nineteenth-century commercial building in Kendall Square. Although dwarfed by surrounding large developments, the Luke Building remains a prominent building in the Square, distinguished by its intact nineteenth century design. Among its important architectural features are its masonry construction; simple, repetitive rhythm of window openings and structural bays; rare, intact storefront configuration; and such small-scale details as projecting segmental window hoods, a granite string course at the second story, tie rods with star tieplates on the end walls, a side drive-through passage, and intact loading bays and pulleys on the rear wall.

The building is a splendid example of 19th century vernacular commercial construction and is one of only a handful of pre-modern buildings remaining in the area. Well preserved, with a minimum of exterior alterations, it portrays the economic and social development of Cambridgeport from open marsh land to a thriving commercial center and gateway to Boston.

Across the city, there are probably only five or so other 1870s brick commercial blocks in a comparable state of preservation still standing, including two private dormitories built in Harvard Square for Harvard undergraduates. The other three are 305 Cambridge Street (1877), a small Panel Brick structure built on speculation; the Italianate block of stores (1874) at 1379-85 Cambridge Street, Inman Square; and the mansard-roofed Whitney Block (1870-71) at 893-907 Main Street. Of these, the Luke Building relates most closely in design to the 1874 Inman Square block, with which it shares elements such as a row of

ground floor storefronts and segmental-arched windows, as well as a common construction date. Architecturally, then, the Luke Building is significant to the city as a whole as one of the few surviving commercial structures of this material and era in Cambridge.

#### C. Historic Photographs



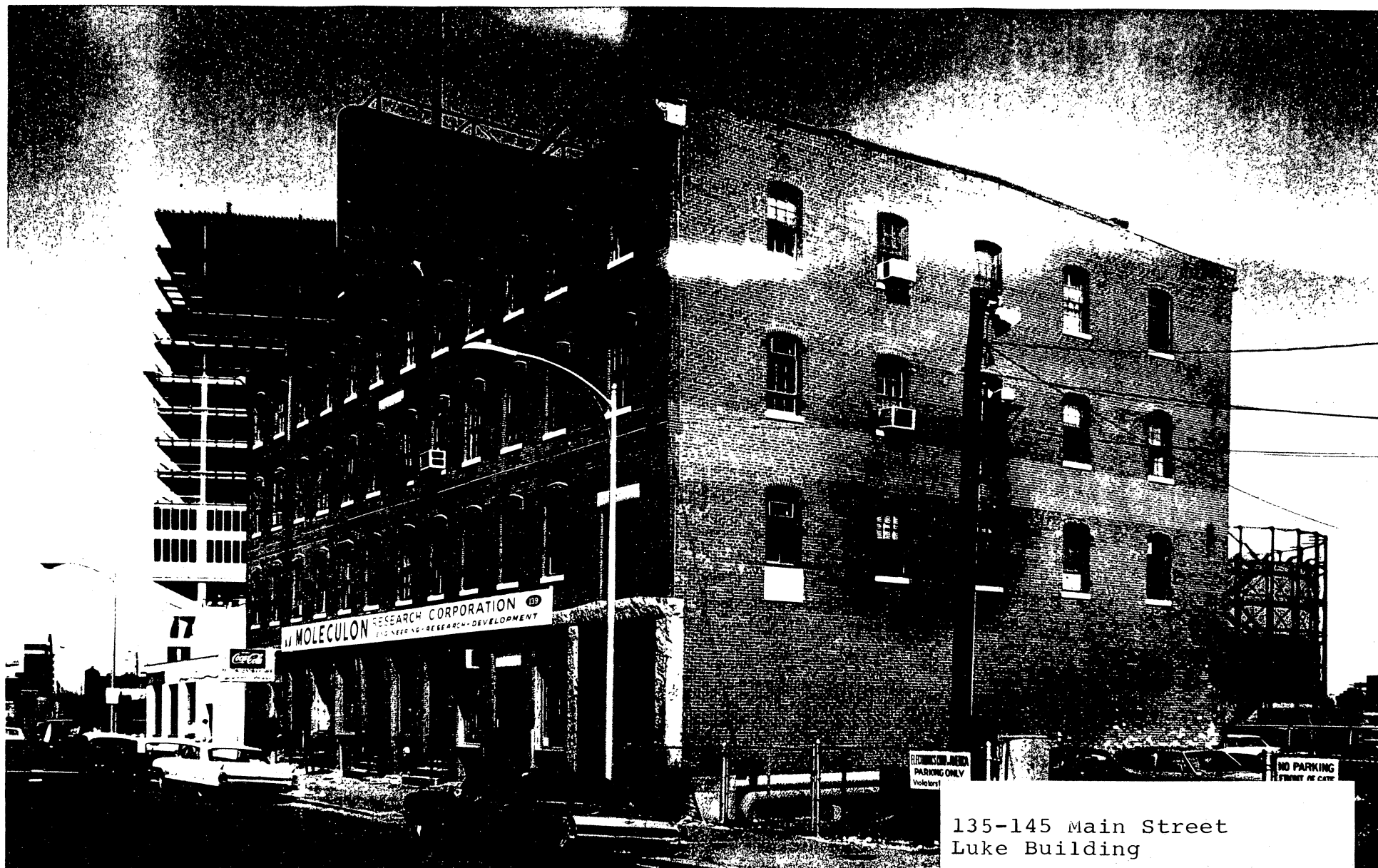
135-145 Main Street  
Luke Building

1899, City Engineer's  
Collection



135-145 Main Street  
Luke Building

Kendall Square Street  
Cleaning Machine,  
March, 1945



135-145 Main Street  
Luke Building

May, 1965

## V. Relationship to Criteria

### A. Section 4, Ordinance 1002

Section 4 states the criteria for landmark designation. It says that the Commission:

. . . may recommend for designation as a landmark any . . . structure . . . either (a) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City . . . or (b) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction, or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures . . .

### B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

In reference to criterion (a), the Luke Building is significant in the overall architectural, economic and social history of the City as the only surviving nineteenth century commercial building in Kendall Square. It is one of only two surviving nineteenth century structures, the others being Engine House #7 at 350 Main Street and the Broad Canal, which, along with the Luke Building are links to the commercial economy of nineteenth-century Cambridgeport. Elijah Luke's building represents the successful commercial development in Kendall Square and east Main Street that followed the initial failure of the Cambridgeport Proprietors in the early 1800s.

Under criterion (b), the Luke Building is architecturally significant in terms of its period, style, and method of construction. It is the only commercial building of the nineteenth century in the Kendall Square area and remains in unaltered and physically intact condition. It is also one of less than a half dozen surviving brick commercial buildings of the 1870s in Cambridge.

Architecturally, it is a very good example of vernacular Italianate commercial architecture with all of its original major features intact. The only important element that has been altered is the storefronts, the sash of which have been reconfigured in their original openings. Distinguishing features of the building's Italianate style are its segmental-arched window hoods, string courses, and corbelled cornice. The commercial function of the building is evident in several features of its construction, among them, the tall, narrow storefronts, the driveway incorporated into the structure of the building, loading bays in the second floor end bays and in the driveway

passage, and various minor details, such as the bumpers in the driveway and the pintles for hanging iron shutters over the windows. It thus preserves well the important features of its period, style, and method of construction.

The staff finds the Luke Building eligible for landmark designation under Ordinance 1002, section 4, criteria (a) and (b).

## VI. Recommendations

### A. Section 1, Ordinance 1002

The purpose of landmark designation is stated in Section 1 of Ordinance 1002:

. . . to preserve, conserve, and protect the beauty of the City . . . and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation, and maintenance of . . . structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose . . .

### B. Preservation Options

The Luke Building has been identified for landmark designation. The building is located on the major commercial corridor (Massachusetts Avenue-Main Street) of Cambridge. Within the context of Cambridge commercial architecture, the Luke Building is one of a small number of intact nineteenth-century brick commercial blocks still standing in the city.

Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places would protect the building from the adverse effects of federally licensed, permitted or funded projects and, through listing on the parallel State Register of Historic Places, from the adverse effects of state funded projects. The National and State Registers would provide limited protection from public projects through review by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. However, the Massachusetts Historical Commission's power does not allow for review of privately-funded projects.

Other options for the preservation of the Luke Building include designation as a Landmark under Ordinance 1002, or placement of a Preservation Easement under the provisions of MGL Chapter 184.

### C. Staff Recommendation

The Cambridge Historical Commission is mandated to identify, protect and preserve landmark buildings. Having found the building eligible under landmark criteria, the staff recommendation is that the Luke Building be forwarded to the City Council for designation as a Protected Landmark. Alternatively, a preservation easement could be placed on the building, if such an option became preferable.

## VII. Statement of Standards for Design Review

### A. Introduction

The Commission's primary charge under Ordinance 1002 is to review "all construction, demolition, or alteration that effects the exterior architectural features, other than color, of any landmark." This landmark study report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics which led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, those features should be preserved and/or enhanced in any construction, demolition, or alteration of a landmark.

Section 8 of the ordinance sets general guidelines to be considered by the Historical Commission in reviewing changes to landmarks. Among other things, the Commission is directed to consider:

the historic and architectural value and significance of the site or structure, the general design, arrangement, texture and material of the features involved, and the relation of such features to similar features or structures in the surrounding area.

In all cases, a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability must be issued by the Historical Commission prior to making any changes to a landmark. The Commission does not have authority to regulate the interiors of landmarks nor can it control changes to exterior architectural features not subject to public views. Nonetheless, Certificates of Non-Applicability must generally be issued for those changes. Applications for most certificates are reviewed by the Commission at a public hearing, in accordance with Ordinance 1002.

### B. General Standards

1. Historic and architectural features of the landmark shall be preserved.
2. Changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have acquired significance in their own right and that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.

5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged.
6. The surface cleaning of a landmark shall be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.
7. New additions must not destroy significant exterior architectural features and shall not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinctive character of the landmark, neighborhood and environment.
8. New additions should be done in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.

#### C. Statement of Standards

##### 1. General

- a. Allow for rehabilitation and new construction to take place as per plans substantially in accordance with those submitted and approved by the Inspectional Services Department and made a part of building permit #081821, to include construction of an addition at the rear of the existing building and construction of a penthouse and mechanical room on the roof.

##### 2. Exterior Walls

- b. Repoint brick using mortar that matches the existing mortar in texture, color and strength.
- a. Remove any residual paint from all masonry elements using the mildest form of chemical wash under low pressure.

##### 3. Windows

- a. Replacement sash shall match the original in size and configuration.

##### 4. Roof

- a. New rooftop additions shall be set back from the existing eave as far as possible on the south, east and west elevations.

## 5. Other Elements

- a. Restore iron gates at mouth of passageway.
- b. Maintain original masonry storefront openings.
- c. Maintain original finishes in passageway, including ceiling loading bay.
- d. Document appearance of rear elevation prior to construction of new addition.

## VIII. Proposed Order

## ORDERED

That the Luke Building, 135-45 Main Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on \_\_\_\_\_. The premises so designated are defined as Parcel 26 of Assessors' Map 14.

This designation is justified by the important associations of the building with the architectural and economic history of the City of Cambridge, specifically as the only surviving nineteenth-century commercial building in Kendall Square and as a reflection of the bulk goods trade that characterized the Square's late nineteenth-century economy.

Architecturally, the building is significant as an excellent example of nineteenth-century Italianate commercial construction and one of three surviving brick commercial buildings of its period in the city. Well preserved, with a minimum of alterations, the Luke Building contributes to an understanding of the evolution of the Kendall Square from open marsh land to a thriving commercial center and gateway to Boston.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated landmark area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of the Luke Building, that would in either case be visible from a public way without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship, or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall permit the owners to rehabilitate the Luke Building as provided in Section VII, Standards for Design Review, and subject to overall determination by the Commission that final plans for the Luke Building's rehabilitation are not incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, and distinctive character of the landmark.



## CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139  
TEL. 498-9011

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT  
ROBERT W. HEALY  
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI  
Deputy City Manager

April 2, 1990

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Attached, please find three Landmark Designation Study Reports,  
prepared by Sarah Zimmerman of the Cambridge Historical Commission, along  
with the proposed orders for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy  
City Manager

RWH/mev  
enclosure

Three Landmark designations:

1. The Luke Building  
135-45 Main Street
2. William Frost House  
10 Frost Street
3. The Union # 2 Engine House  
787 - 789 Main Street

In City Council,

April 2, 1990

*Yabled by Councillor  
Sullivan*

*4/23/90*

*3 Orders adopted  
8-0-1.*