



The Cambridge Historian

The newsletter of the Cambridge Historical Society

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The Agassiz Baldwin
Neighborhood Issue

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Love Story By Liz Adams Lasser

On December 25, 1970, Hollywood's sentimental film *Love Story* made its New England debut at the Circle Theater in Brookline. The much anticipated film, starring heartthrob Ryan O'Neal (*Peyton Place*) and the stunning Ali MacGraw (*Goodbye, Columbus*), became an overnight success. The movie was based on Harvard graduate Erich Segal's novel, which spent over a year on the *New York Times* hardcover best-seller list.

Love Story tells the tale of star-crossed lovers Harvard student Oliver Barrett IV and Radcliffe student Jennifer Cavilleri. The movie chronicles their courtship and marriage in Cambridge and at the same time illuminates the socioeconomic divide between Oliver's wealthy family and Jenny's more humble origins. The film broke many 1970s box office records. It received seven Academy Award nominations and won the Oscar for best original score.

While the film is known as one of the last movies filmed on the Harvard campus with the full cooperation of the university, most viewers do not realize that some of the movie's key scenes were filmed along Oxford Street in the Agassiz neighborhood.

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Soundtrack of *Love Story*, CHS Ephemera Collection

The Cyclotron By Bruce Irving

For nearly 65 years, the corner of Oxford and Hammond streets was the home of a nuclear family quite unlike the others in the neighborhood. This one was large, mostly male, heavy on the PhD's (with a few Nobel Prize winners thrown in), and housed in a pair of buildings called the Harvard Cyclotron Laboratory (HCL). Demolished in 2003, the cyclotron and its control building were central to experiments and discoveries that shaped modern nuclear medicine and, in its first incarnation, the development of the atomic bomb.

Cyclotrons were one of the first types of particle accelerator, using strong magnetic and electrical fields to speed subatomic particles along a circular path. The resulting beam of highly charged particles can be used for anti-tumor therapy or to activate a variety of reactions in physics experiments. Harvard's first cyclotron was completed in 1938, a few years after the machine's invention by Ernest Lawrence of the University of California in Berkeley. Its magnet weighed 85 tons.



Courtesy of the Office of Naval Research, U.S. Navy

The lab had clocked over a thousand hours of operation by the time the U.S. was drawn into World War II in 1941, and the cyclotron's fate was quickly altered by the start of the Manhattan Project.

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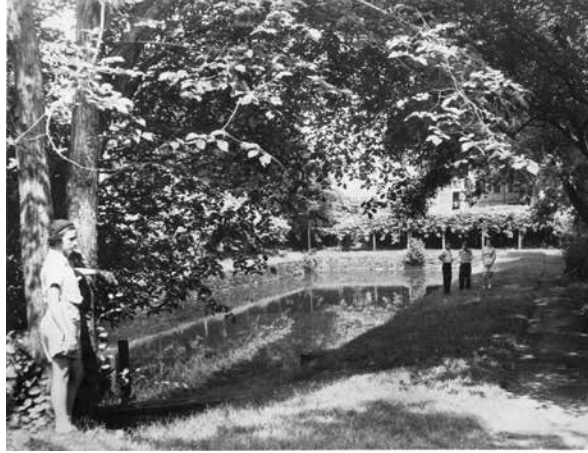
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From a Bleachery to a Playground

It does look something like a swimming pool in this undated photograph from the Historical Commission. The location is just off Sacramento Street, and the girl, resting her arm against a tree, looks as if she is contemplating a swim, while the three adults lend a note of artistic composition to the scene.



Courtesy of the Cambridge Historical Commission

A current image, however, will show Sacramento Field, a neighborhood playground with no hint of a pool — let alone of the reservoir for the Middlesex Bleachery that occupied the site some 70 years ago. “To the occasional observer,” the *Cambridge Chronicle* wrote in 1922, the pool “presents a beautiful appearance... bordered on three sides by arched arbors which in summer are weighted down by grapes.”

The reservoir was fed by natural springs and artesian wells. At one end, near Massachusetts Avenue, the idyllic scene was upstaged

By Michael Kenney

by a long narrow building with a tall steel smokestack. Inside were pumps that every day forced some 100,000 gallons of water through a long concrete pipe that led under Beacon Street to the bleaching and dying vats in Somerville. As the story goes, the owner of the bleaching plant had heard about the spring, bought the property, and created the reservoir. But he also “saw the possibilities of the place for recreation,” hiring gardeners to plant flowers and even stocking the pool with fish for anglers.

The idyllic scene had changed by the 1940s, and by 1960 the site was described as “vacant” and as “not used.”

The site came back to life in the 1980s. Harvard had bought it in the mid-1950s and had land-banked property on which they planned to build 40 units of housing. But the neighborhood was strongly opposed, and the city moved to purchase the site with City Manager James Sullivan opining: “We want to give Harvard the first opportunity to be known as a philanthropic institution.” Harvard wasn’t buying the city’s \$480,000 offer, holding out for another quarter-million dollars, prompting the city to take the site by eminent domain. Harvard sold most of the property it had acquired, retaining two neighboring parcels for undergraduate housing.

Before the matter was settled, City Councillor Al Vellucci played his always entertaining role: “If Harvard gets flippy with us, we can get a little flippy in return. The taxpayers of Cambridge pay for all the electricity that lights all the streets around Harvard. We should send the Electrical Department around to these streets, and start turning off those lights.”

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Evolving Agassiz By Rolf Goetze

Three famous men — Asa Gray, Louis Agassiz, and Charles Darwin — shaped our understanding of our origin, and two of them lived in Cambridge. Gray was the eminent botanist at Harvard, classifying plants into families and monitoring their worldwide distribution. Agassiz, an animal taxonomist and founder of Harvard's Museum of Natural History, expounded a theory that ice ages had shaped our topography. Meanwhile, Darwin was pondering how the creatures and birds he saw in the Galápagos and South America fitted together. At the outset, all three believed in creation and the fixity of species.

In the 1840s Agassiz came to Harvard from Switzerland, and Gray eagerly introduced him to the American scientific establishment.

As late as 1858, Gray accepted a sort of static, God's-order vision of all species, but he was an empiricist, following observable evidence. Already in the 1840s, he noted in print that eastern North America and eastern Asia, especially Japan, both hosted many plants found nowhere else. Identical or closely similar species were growing a world apart.

In 2011, David Dobbs wrote an article for *Wired* magazine: "How Charles Darwin Seduced Asa Gray." The puzzling similarity of plant species in our Northeast with Japan gradually drew Gray into a long correspondence with Charles Darwin, which led to Gray's accepting Darwin's ideas that species adapt, thereby putting him at odds with Agassiz.

According to Dobbs, this correspondence led in 1857 to Darwin's making Gray "the third confidante to know of his theory of evolution, including his ideas on natural selection... He offered his ideas as admittedly blasphemous and doubtless flawed while making clear the key mechanism — the selection and amplification of advantageous traits through greater survival and reproductive rates of the individuals who happened to inherit them — that elevated his above previous transmutation theories."

What truly sold Gray, in those months between Darwin's private confession of the theory and his publication of it more fully, was the light Darwin's theory shed on the Japan-North America pattern Gray had long been pondering. Gray solved this puzzle, as Dobbs says: "by essentially treating the two great continents as islands formerly joined. Though this seems routine in our post-plate-tectonics

era, it was a big leap at the time. . . . Gray connected and disconnected the two continents by using Agassiz' Ice Age theory."



Louis Agassiz, c.1850 CHS Image Collection

Dobbs goes on to report that "Gray wrote... a review of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in the *Atlantic* in July 1860, providing a pivotal victory for Darwin: It gave his highly controversial theory, which he had published the previous December, the support of one of America's most respected scientists. Gray proved a key ... advocate for Darwin in the U.S., especially during 1860, when he thrice defeated in debate America's most prominent scientist, the zoologist Louis Agassiz. Agassiz, a creationist, resisted Darwin's theory ferociously. He did so both because he disagreed and because he himself had become the country's most famous scientist by beautifully articulating a vision of species as works of God. Agassiz had built his career on this vision."

Agassiz's attempts to refute Darwin's ideas "proved maddeningly difficult... At the January 1860 meeting of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Agassiz reasserted the fixity of species by trying to refute any relationship between Tertiary-period seashell fossils and present forms — but was soundly contradicted by William Barton Rogers, a prominent geologist who was then starting the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"Most of Agassiz' Harvard colleagues (as well as the Massachusetts legislature) continued to support Agassiz' Harvard museum, and the scientific community continued to recognize the great value of his taxonomic and curatorial work. But as a theoretician, Agassiz walked alone.

"As he recognized himself by writing only for the popular press, the scientific debate had moved on. His own students were questioning and deserting him. Colleagues grew less deferential... Members of the Academy of Arts and Sciences — a group that Agassiz had long dominated — began siding with Gray on political matters, and in 1863 they elected Gray president and William Rogers secretary. Gray had outmaneuvered, outvoted, and embarrassed Agassiz in the elitist political structure that he himself had founded."

This competition has been dramatically recreated from Gray's and Darwin's letter exchanges, which you can stream to your computer: Go to the performance of *Re:Design* recorded on February 14, 2008, at the MIT Museum.

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The Agassiz Paths

By Phoebe Sinclair



The Agassiz neighborhood paths were designed to inspire people of all ages and abilities, but especially elders, to walk around the neighborhood

for health and entertainment.

Between 2011 and 2013, volunteers identified and researched 43 historic places and 28 types of trees, dividing them into four separate walks of about an hour each. The walks were developed in association with the Living Well Network, the Agassiz Baldwin Community's grassroots program to engage and support residents over age 55, and were made possible through a grant from the Cambridge Agassiz Harvard Fund.

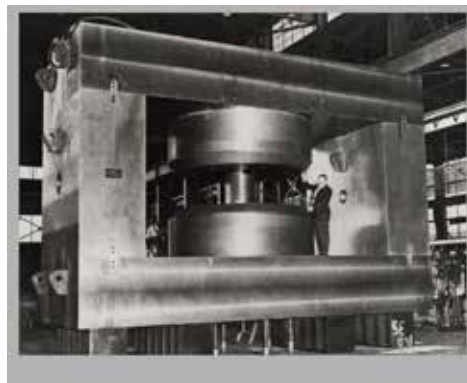
You can download a copy of the paths from the Agassiz Baldwin Community website: bit.ly/agassiz-path. A limited number of free booklets are available at the community center at 20 Sacramento Street. For more information, call 617-349-6287 x10.

The Cyclotron *continued*

Secret negotiations between Harvard's president, James B. Conant, and the head of the project, General Leslie Groves, resulted in its being sold to the federal government for a dollar. According to a history written by Harvard physics professor Richard Wilson, secrecy demanded a cover story: the device "was needed for medical treatment of military personnel and it was sent to St. Louis to be forwarded to an 'unknown destination' (Los Alamos)." Harvard physics department chairman Percy Bridgman was reported to have told the government scientist overseeing the transfer, "If you want it for what you say you want it for, you can't have it. If you want it for what I think you want it for, of course you can have it."

After the war, Harvard wasted no time constructing a new cyclotron. With the U.S. Office of Naval Research paying for the machinery and the university paying for the buildings, the new Harvard Cyclotron Laboratory was dedicated on June 15, 1949. This time the magnet consisted of 641 tons of steel and 74 tons of copper, big enough to make it the third largest in the country; the size of its 14-foot-diameter coils was dictated by the clearance of the railroad bridges between Cambridge and the General Electric plant that built them in Pittsfield.

The buildings themselves were the work of the venerable architectural firm of Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch & Abbott, successor to a partnership founded in 1874 by H. H. Richardson. In a 2001 report, the Cambridge Historical Commission described them as modernist structures, the Cyclotron Building "an understated but elegant building" whose "overhanging concrete cornice and glass-block frieze provide just enough ornamentation to keep the building from being a plain concrete vault." That concrete, where it surrounded the cyclotron, was 3 feet thick.



Courtesy of the Office of Naval Research, U.S. Navy

The machine itself operated silently, its output of 160 million electron volts producing a beam of protons traveling at half the speed of light and capable of penetrating about 17 centimeters of tissue.

"The thing that makes protons shine," says Bernie Gottschalk, who was a senior research fellow at HCL from 1981 to 2002, "is that they can be steered and focused very precisely." This made the Harvard beam particularly effective at destroying growths like eye cancers and those near-critical structures such as the brain or spinal cord. During its heyday, HCL was by far the foremost proton therapy facility in the world, says Gottschalk, taking patients referred from the U.S. and many other countries to Mass. General and Mass. Eye and Ear. Some 18 Harvard technicians were charged with keeping the equipment running, while the clinical team came from MGH. Other lab work included studies of potential cosmic radiation damage of spacebound equipment for NASA and AT&T.

All good things come to an end, however, and so they did for the cyclotron when Harvard decided to put up new science buildings in its place. On April 10, 2002, the cyclotron treated its last patient — its 9,115th. The machine was shut down on June 2, and the facility was dismantled soon after, the giant magnet cut up and sold for scrap. Still, the technology and procedures used so successfully at the corner of Oxford and Hammond live on: there are currently 12 proton therapy cyclotrons at work in the U.S., with 15 more under construction.

Maria Baldwin, 1856-1922

The Agassiz School, named for the naturalist Louis Agassiz, was renamed for Maria Baldwin in 2002. Maria Baldwin was brilliant, a gifted educator and administrator who — as an African-American woman in the 19th century — rose to be the principal of a school, overseeing 12 white teachers who taught over 500 students, most of them white and many the children of Harvard professors. And she did this in a school named for Agassiz, whose writings on race were used to provide scientific legitimacy for discrimination and exclusion.

Born and educated in Cambridge, Baldwin graduated from the Cambridge Teachers Training School in 1875. She taught briefly in Maryland and then returned to Cambridge as a teacher of primary grades in 1882. In 1889, she was appointed principal of the Agassiz School and remained there for 24 years. When a new Agassiz School was built in 1916, she was appointed master, one of only two women to hold that position at the time. She was a member of many civic organizations



Maria Baldwin
Courtesy of the Cambridge Public Library

and lectured widely. As a researcher using the CHS's Sara Bull Collection recently discovered, she was asked to be a speaker at one of the famous Cambridge Conferences. She spoke on April 14, 1897, on Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The poet E. E. Cummings, her pupil for a time, wrote of her in an autobiographical reminiscence: "Never did any demidivine dictator more gracefully and easily rule a more unruly and less graceful populace. Her very presence emanated an honor and a glory: the honor of spiritual freedom — no mere freedom from — and the glory of being, not (like most extant mortals) really undead, but actually alive."

Baldwin died of a heart attack in 1922 while giving a lecture at the Robert Gould Shaw House Association meeting. Her funeral at the Arlington Street Church was attended by many, including Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard. The same year, a memorial tablet was placed in the hall of the Agassiz School. It hangs today in the Maria Baldwin School.

To read the story of the school's renaming, see page 7.

Love Story *continued*

Throughout *Love Story*, viewers can glimpse Cambridge before urban renewal, before cell phones, and before personal computers. Much of the film's visual honesty, however, comes from director Arthur Hiller's portrayal of Oliver and Jenny's newlywed life in the Agassiz neighborhood (before gentrification).

After being cut off by his stuffy father (Ray Milland), Oliver sets up shop as a newlywed and carries Jenny over the threshold at 119 Oxford Street. The couple pinches their pennies and dimes on Skippy peanut butter sandwiches while Oliver begins his grueling time at Harvard Law School. Hiller's decision to film in the Agassiz area was no doubt influenced by a stingy \$2 million budget and the area's proximity to the law school. At the time, Paramount Pictures was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the movie was almost not made. Ultimately, it earned \$200 million and put Paramount in the black.

One of *Love Story*'s pivotal scenes occurs on Oxford Street near the end of the couple's time in Cambridge. After an argument with Jenny over Oliver's strained relationship with his father, she runs out of their apartment. With the film's haunting theme in the background, Oliver pounds the pavement in the Agassiz neighborhood as he desperately searches for her in the Gold Star Laundry (now the Oxford Spa Laundromat, at 102-104 Oxford Street)* and then past the old Agassiz School at the corner of Sacramento Street. Oliver finally returns to 119 Oxford, where he finds a crying

Jenny sitting on the porch. It is here that she utters the line "Love means never having to say you're sorry." This line ranks thirteenth on the American Film Institute's list of all-time famous movie quotes.

Eventually *Love Story* and its plot careen toward New York City and its tragic end, though not before a final aerial shot of the Agassiz neighborhood from a building crane, another cost savings the director used during filming. As they drive away, Jenny remarks, "It was a good apartment for eighty bucks." Oliver replies, "Yeah, but our new garage will cost as much." Times have changed.

*Today you can see the Gold Star Laundry sign hanging on a wall inside the laundromat. It was outside the building in the film. A fading sign also sits in the window of 102 Oxford: "This LAUNDROMAT WAS IN THE MOVIE *Love Story*."



Photo by Liz Adams Lasser

The Howl

By Richard Griffin

The Howl was born in 1992 from a conversation held in midair over the Atlantic Ocean. My wife, Susan Keane, and I were returning from a vacation, and we were in the mood for a new project, preferably one that would benefit our neighborhood. We finally agreed that some kind of periodical could bring the people of Howland Street closer together. It would be an informal newsletter drawing on the talents of our neighbors but respectful of their privacy.

As it turned out, *The Howl* became a service that enabled members of our neighborhood to become more aware of one another. This benefit applies especially when new people move in. They can introduce themselves to readers or allow the editor to do it for them. Over time, neighbors have become essential contributors to *The Howl*. We invite them to share their news, their insights, and their creativity, and we especially treasure the contributions of children. They frequently have come up with fine poems and beautiful drawings that seem to grow in value as the years go by.

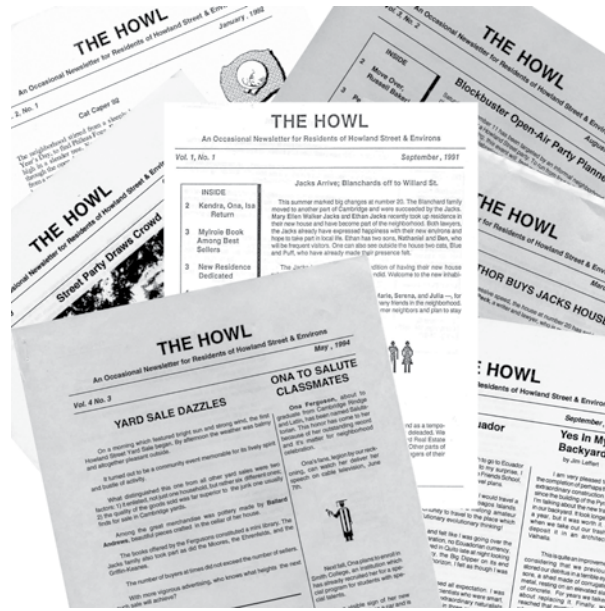
A look at *The Howl* over more than 20 years of publication shows much development. We who published it found new ways to make our pages informative. More residents found pleasure in contributing material. The humorists

among us made the paper more enjoyable. So did the artists, poets, and raconteurs. It became easier to publish drawings and photographs. And we learned how to distribute *The Howl* across wider areas through email. Readers not living nearby, some of them on other continents, found ways of enjoying the publication.

Some contributions stand out — for example, the one in which George Hein tells about his family’s exodus from fascist Italy. This story was accompanied by a picture of the ship that carried him as a young child to safety in the port of New York. And the fine photos of birds and other fauna submitted by Sherry Leffert

are outstanding graphic art. I also enjoyed Bernd Widdig’s fine account of a bicycle trip from the top of Europe to the bottom, and, of course, I continue to value the holiday poem contributed by Susan Keane each December. She manages to include all Howland Street humans and most of their pets, trying to find rhyme and rhythm in their names. And photos of the area’s children in costume on Halloween night are a special treat each year.

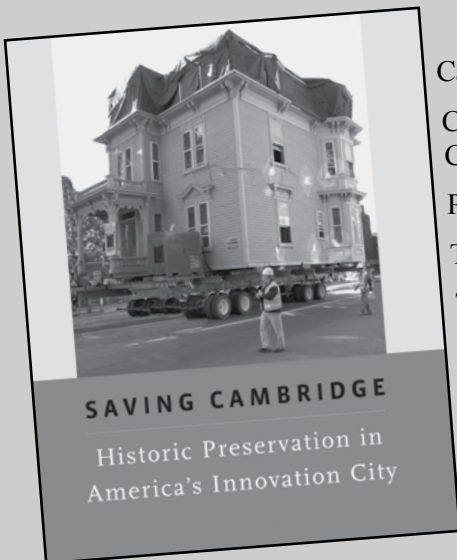
We like to think that anyone interested in the recent history of the area covered by *The Howl* could find much material for study. They would see how a neighborhood changes as a city transforms itself.



Issues of *The Howl*. The CHS archives hold every issue of *The Howl*.

Saving History

The Cambridge Historical Society’s latest book, *Saving Cambridge*, features case studies of six buildings in the Agassiz Baldwin Neighborhood. You can pick up a copy at:



- Cambridge Historical Society
- Cambridge Historical Commission
- Porter Square Books
- The Harvard Book Store
- The Harvard Coop
- Rodney’s Books
- MIT Press Bookstore
- Cambridge Antique Market

The Agassiz Baldwin Community



Courtesy of Prellwitz Chilinski Associates

A history of the Agassiz Baldwin Community (ABC) and the Maud Morgan Art Center, by Prellwitz Chilinski Associates, is in our new book, *Saving Cambridge*. To read the article, stop by a local bookstore and pick up a copy or order one at cambridgehistory.org.

A Note from the New Editor By Bruce Irving

It's a great honor to have been asked to fill the editorial shoes of Michael Kenney. I promise, moving forward, to bring my A game to this important publication.

Time and again, our surveys show that Cantabrigians — CHS members and nonmembers alike — value the *Cambridge Historian* every time it pops into their mailboxes. I know that I always learn something from its rich mix — the last issue was so full of interesting facts about Huron Village that I'm still dropping "Did you know..." questions on my friends.

I love how much history is appreciated and celebrated in this, my adopted hometown — not the least because of how important it was in my original home, Darien, Connecticut. That's where, in the fifth grade, I visited the

Bates-Scofield House, a c. 1736 saltbox that functions as both the headquarters of the Darien Historical Society and as a museum of colonial life. I was absolutely fascinated, and I think that visit set me on a path that eventually led to my years as a producer of *This Old House*, my *Design New England* magazine column about New England's built environment, my spot on the Cambridge Historical Commission, and even my work as a Realtor. It's been great fun so far, and I can only hope some other youngster (perhaps a reader of this newsletter) will get bitten as I did.

I'm looking forward to helping make the *Cambridge Historian* the best it can be. Here's to old houses, living history, and an ongoing fascination about how this city's remarkable present came to be.

The Old Agassiz Photograph by Bruce Myren



This three-image montage by the photographer and Agassiz Baldwin resident Bruce Myren shows the Agassiz School in 1994. The Cambridge Historical Society will be working with Myren on an exhibition exploring the Washington Elm in the fall of 2014. This project is made possible through the support of the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati and the Cambridge Arts Council.

The Remeasure of Agassiz By Jasmine Laietmark

Cambridge was on the cutting edge of science in the 19th century. Unfortunately, several star academics used the banner of science to support bigoted ideologies. Luckily, the scientific method also brought redemption by the second half of the 20th century.

The paleontologist and Agassiz resident Stephen Jay Gould took his forebears' science head-on in his book *The Mismeasure of Man*. Targeting his neighborhood's namesake, Gould publicly refuted the methods and conclusions of Louis Agassiz. He did this from the same Harvard halls Agassiz had walked — in fact, Gould was the Alexander Agassiz Professor of Zoology, named after Louis's scientist son.

While many applauded Gould's critique of biological determinism, it was but one of his scientific transgressions. He became a controversial figure in the field of macro-evolutionary studies, straying from the mainstream evolutionary thought of his era when he and his partner,

Niles Eldredge, argued that evolution as shown by the fossil record came in "fits and starts" rather than a steady lineage through a long period of time. This theory, known as punctuated equilibrium, challenged the idea of how evolution moves.

Gould's outspoken style and flair for connecting science and baseball helped him become one of the most famous scientists of the 20th century. In his *New York Times* obituary, he is said to have "revived the art of the scientific essay." His writings, that were accessible to a layperson, led to fame that is unusual for an evolutionary biologist. He was even depicted as a character on the popular TV show *The Simpsons*.

In 2001, Gould's writings were assigned to students in the Agassiz School. On reading Gould's account, ninth-grader Nathaniel Vogel was inspired to start the process that led to the school's being renamed the Maria Baldwin School.

The Gold Rush By Michael Kenney

When Charles F. McClure came back from the California Gold Rush, he bought an extensive tract of land off Massachusetts Avenue (then known as North Avenue) and commemorated his "49er" fortune by naming the street running through his property Sacramento Street.

Other names recall long-forgotten residents, at least four of them women. Wendell Street was named for Katherine Brattle Wendell, a daughter of the Tory general, and Mellen Street was named for her daughter, Martha Fitch Mellen. Hammond Street is named for Mary Ann Hammond, the wife of the landowner John Gorham Palfrey. Prentiss Street takes its name from Mary Saunders Prentiss, a daughter of another prominent landowner, William Saunders.

Then there is Eustis Street, perhaps named for Margaret Eustis, a widow who owned the 1822 house that was moved to the corner of Eustis and Oxford streets — or, perhaps, her husband, the governor and diplomat William Eustis, who had purchased the property.

Breaking the pattern are Garfield Street, laid out and named shortly after the assassination of President James A. Garfield in 1881, and Everett Street, which, like many other Cambridge streets, is named for a Harvard president, Edward Everett. Finally, there is Roseland Street, which recalls a long-ago nursery in the neighborhood.



Photo by Jasmine Laitmark

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A Stump Chair By Mitch Ryerson

The Oxford Street chair. I made it in 1997 with kids from the high school and from the neighborhood. This was the first of the ten stump chairs I ended up doing. I got a small grant from the Arts Council and met with the neighbors before I started. This one was an old elm tree that had to be removed due to disease. It was a great location because of the school and playground.

