



The Cambridge Historian

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The Port
Neighborhood Issue

When the Port Was a Port By Michael Kenney	1
Model Cities, A Glorious Idea By Gavin Kleespies	1
Early Days at Newtowne Court By Jane McGuirk Richards	3
Area 4: A Graphic History By Roho, Gavin Kleespies, and Jerel Dye	4
African American Heritage Trail Sites of the Port	6
What's in a Name? By Bruce Irving	Back cover

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The Cambridge Historian
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When the Port Was a Port By Michael Kenney

An early-20th-century photograph of the schooner *Henry Endicott* heading up the Charles River toward the Broad Canal stands as evidence that there was a time when the “port” in Cambridgeport had real meaning.



On the Banks of the Charles River, Cambridgeport, Mass. by John W. A. Scott (1850s). In *History of American Marine Painting* by John Wilmerding. CHC

The *Henry Endicott* was a 192-foot, three-masted schooner built in Bath, Maine, in 1908 for the Cambridge Electric Light Company and named for the president of the Cambridgeport Savings Bank. It was already an anachronism, for by that time barges had become easier to build and operate, and a tug could tow a string of barges needing fewer crewmen. But as a schooner-barge, it survived as a workhorse until September 18, 1939.

According to an account from the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, the *Henry Endicott* had loaded paving blocks from quarries on Vinalhaven Island, Maine, and along with two other barges — perhaps other time-gone-by schooners — was taken in tow by a tug bound for New York. But off Plymouth’s Manomet Point, “heavy seas parted the towline and opened its seams.” The crew, after firing distress rockets, abandoned ship. Before help could arrive, the schooner had sunk in some 80 feet of water. It is now listed by CZM as a recreational diving site. (*continued on page 7*)

Model Cities, A Glorious Idea By Gavin Kleespies

The Model Cities program may have been the high water mark of progressive national policy in America. It was a project of the Department of Housing and Urban Development under President Lyndon Johnson and a part of his War on Poverty. Its core idea was that the residents in the poorest neighborhoods knew what their neighborhoods needed. If you gave them resources, they would create programs to address these issues. Model Cities envisioned the federal government’s picking a handful of communities, giving them all the resources they could use, listening to neighborhood councils, building the programs they suggested, and, if the programs worked, using them as models for future federal programs. Cambridge, specifically the Port and the Wellington/Harrington neighborhoods, was one of the first 63 cities chosen to participate. Unfortunately, as with all high water marks, there is only one way to go, and while the Model Cities was a glorious idea, its realization left the city and the neighborhoods divided.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Cambridge was the second largest industrial center in Massachusetts. But the second half of the century was not kind. The effort of World War II and the GI Bill led to the construction of a national highway system and federal incentives to build new houses in suburban communities. Modern manufacturing pulled out of the inner cities and used truck transportation rather than rail lines. Simultaneously, there was an exodus of the affluent to achieve the newly minted ideal of a single-family home with a white picket fence and a car in the driveway. Urban manufacturing centers collapsed. From 1950 to 1960, Cambridge’s population fell by 10 percent, and the city continued to have a negative population growth for the next 30 years. City planners, fearing economic freefall in urban cores, tried to fight fire with fire and planned roads that would connect the cities to the highways. (*continued on page 3*)

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Early Days at Newtowne Court By Jane McGuirk Richards

We moved into Newtowne Court, door 30, apartment 265, in 1938, when I was one year old. We were among the first families to move in. There were seven of us: two adults and five children—two sets of twin girls and a single boy. Newtowne Court was a new concept in low-income housing. Before Newtowne Court we were living in a cold-water flat. Our new home had three bedrooms and one bathroom. When we moved out in 1955, there were seven children—five girls and two boys. It is comical when I hear how families today need more bathrooms for their small families.

I felt I had 527 playmates—the number of children in Newtowne Court! Most of the kids in the Court used the Margaret Fuller House (MFH), and Washington Elms kids tended to use the Neighborhood House. The MFH was straight across Windsor Street and one block over on Cherry. We used their outdoor play space, the gym, and attended dancing, music, and sewing classes. My sister Betty and I went to the MFH Camp in Newton.

Every Wednesday in the summer at the Neighborhood House they showed movies. We brought a box or small chair, carried it across Washington Street, through the Elms, and over to the yard at the Neighborhood House. The evening would start with a serial like *Zorro* and cartoons, and when it got dark, the main feature would come on. When it was over, we went home, carrying our chairs and boxes.

One evening while walking through the Court I saw that someone had a blue light in their room, and I could see a screen through their window. This family had a magnifying screen in front of

the TV because it was so small. Sometime later I was able to twist the windows open in my apartment in such a way as to see the reflection of the TV next door in my window. We would watch the *Dinah Shore Show* in the reflection, and we argued about who could sit by the window. When the mother next door got wind of it, she moved the TV. We did not get a TV until we moved in 1955.

We would go up on the roof of Newtowne Court with our beach towels and our radios. On a rainy day we could go through our continuous cellar from one side of the Court to the other. The laundry was in the basement, and we played down there. There were bins, and each tenant had a bin to hang their clothes. The big outdoor area we loved was in front of the gym, with two showerheads in the summer. In the winter they froze it, and people went ice skating. In the gym we would have a huge Halloween party every year.

My mother was from Ireland, but her neighbors were American-born. There was such support for women and especially mothers. During wartime, women helped each other; food and clothes were shared. People helped each other with sewing. We did not have a car until we moved out. Most of the men and women walked to their jobs. My father worked in One Kendall Square for a trucking company. My mother worked as a cook for wealthy families on Brattle Street. The man across the hall worked on Main Street in an auto dealership. Another man worked in a candy factory on Main Street. Several neighbors worked in Ward's bakery behind Central Square. Everyone knew their courtyard. *(continued on page 7)*

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Model Cities *(continued from page 1)*

In Cambridge this included the Inner Belt, an eight-lane, raised highway that would have connected I-93 to I-90 by cutting through the Port, Central Square, and Cambridgeport, displacing 1,200 families.

But, of course, Cambridge wasn't like the other factory towns. Cambridge had universities. While industrial Cambridge was collapsing, academic Cambridge was expanding. Harvard and MIT were buying up the old factories, and their faculty and students were moving into the neighborhoods, outbidding residents. So the city's falling population was coupled with rising rents. Between 1960 and 1970, rents in Cambridge rose 90 percent compared to the 26 percent seen in the Boston area as a whole.

It was in this context that the Model Cities program was proposed. Cambridge was early to apply and understood the zeitgeist of the program. The plan was crafted by Justin Gray, assistant to the City Manager for Community Development, and was to target one area, a 268-acre parcel northeast of Central Square between Cambridge Street and Mass. Ave. and ending at the Boston and Albany railroad tracks. This

was the second-smallest project proposed, but it was held up as the best in the nation because of the strong emphasis on community control. Cambridge's Model Cities project was to be overseen by a City Demonstration Agency (CDA) that was made up of 24 members: 8 representatives of nonprofits, universities, and businesses, and 16 elected from and by the residents of Area 3 (Wellington/Harrington) and Area 4 (the Port). The CDA "shall have the exclusive authority to make and provide for the carrying out of plans for the Cambridge Model Cities program," subject to the approval of the neighborhood, and could hire, fire, and set wages for employees with funds from the federal government. In December 1967, Cambridge was the first in the nation to approve a Model Cities contract with HUD, and in May 1968, the operations plan was approved by the city council unanimously in less than ten minutes. The first year's plan called for 29 programs to be carried out with \$1.5 million in federal money. This plan was brought to the neighborhood, and residents voted, 18-1, to approve these programs.

The selected Model Cities were guaranteed five years of funding to start programs, and, if the programs could stand on their own, they were to be the lasting legacy of the project. In the early days, there were some great successes. The projects of the first year included rehabbing public housing, a Housing Advisory Center for legal advice, a hot

lunch program for the elderly, three small neighborhood health centers, and a Skill Center for training and counseling workers and the unemployed.

However, the waters soon became choppy, both nationally and locally. The early concept of a small number of communities benefiting from the program riled politicians, who wanted something to show their home districts. The initial 63 projects were inflated to 154, and as the pie grew, each piece got smaller. President Richard Nixon took office in 1969, and nothing about the Model Cities felt right to him. The administration announced plans to phase out the program and cut funding to HUD.

Locally, things weren't much better, and the project was soon assailed on all sides. In February 1970, the Model Cities office was occupied by 100 residents demanding more money for the Margaret Fuller House. By the end of the year, the staff and board of the Model Cities CDA were occupying the office of the city manager, John Corcoran, directly conflicting with the city administration.

The spark that started this fight was a request for a pay

raise for Model Cities staff that would have been covered by federal funds; however, these funds had to be released by the city manager, and he refused to do so. At the heart of this conflict were two different views. The Model Cities CDA pointed out its programs' successes, but the city pointed out that the federal funding was going to end in two years. Model Cities folks said: The people are hungry, give them food. The city said: If we feed them today, they'll expect it tomorrow.

In the end, the program was funded by the federal government through 1973. Finally, in 1974 HUD gave the Cambridge Model Cities one last grant, an acknowledgment of the exceptional work it had done. However, this grant was for only a third of the previous grants. Bitter infighting ensued. The CDA board met three times a week for three months to figure out how to allocate these funds. In the end, their final meeting in March 1974 ran until midnight and ended with almost everyone dissatisfied, angry, and hurt.

While the program ended with a whimper, it did leave a legacy. Many in the neighborhoods remember the effort, and a number of programs started by or funded through Model Cities survive today, Homeowner's Rehab probably being the best known. It had been a glorious idea, but perhaps it was too glorious to survive in a dirty world of politics and money.



From the collection of Darleen Bonislowski



AREA 4

A GRAPHIC HISTORY

STORY BY ROHO AND GAVIN KLEESPIES
ART BY JEREL DYE



FOR THE FIRST 160 YEARS OF CAMBRIDGE'S EXISTENCE, AREA 4 IS A MARSHLAND WITH A LITTLE ISLAND CALLED PELHAM ISLAND. IN 1793 THE WEST BOSTON BRIDGE IS BUILT. THE BRIDGE OFFERS A MUCH MORE DIRECT ROUTE FROM CAMBRIDGE TO BOSTON, AND EARNS THE OWNERS A SIGNIFICANT SUM FROM TOLLS.



IN 1805 CAMBRIDGEPORT IS DECLARED A U.S. PORT OF DELIVERY. THE WEST BOSTON BRIDGE COMPANY, THE BACKERS OF THE PORT, AND THE OWNERS OF THE CANAL BRIDGE IN EAST CAMBRIDGE BUILD COMPETING ROADWAYS TO DRIVE TRAFFIC TO THEIR BRIDGES AND TO CONTROL TRADE.

USE THE WIRE IT'LL GET YOU WHERE YOU NEED TO GO.

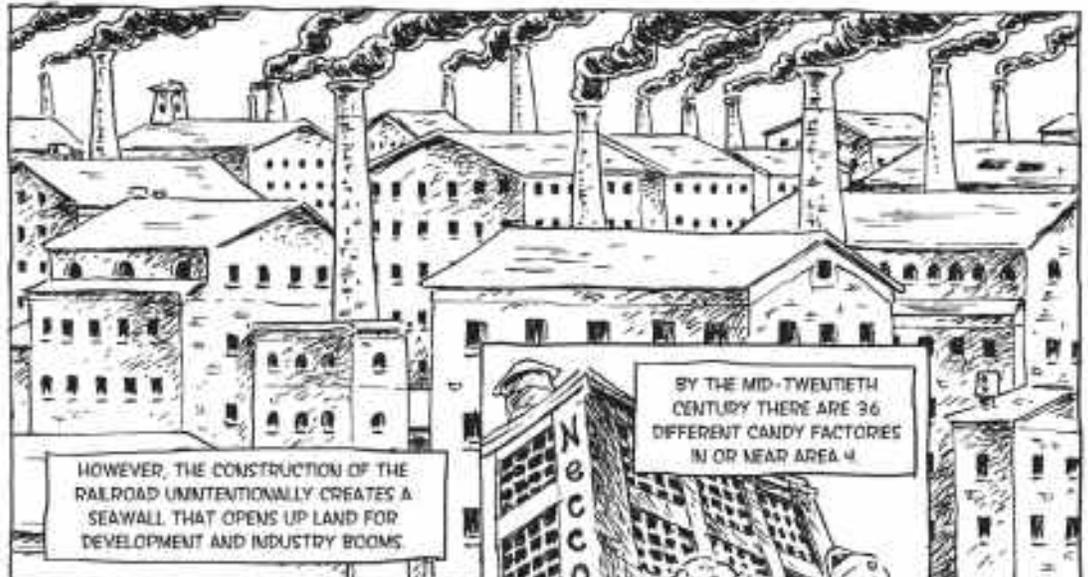
THE CANAL BRIDGE IS FAR SUPERIOR, GOOD SIR OR MADAM.

UNFORTUNATELY THE WAR OF 1812 CRUSHES TRADE. DEVELOPMENT STOPS AND THE AREA FALLS INTO DISUSE.



THINGS ARE STARTING TO LOOK UP WHEN THE GRAND JUNCTION RAILROAD IS BUILT IN 1855.

BUT BY THE END OF THE YEAR THE RAILROAD IS BANKRUPT.



HOWEVER, THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE RAILROAD UNINTENTIONALLY CREATES A SEAWALL THAT OPENS UP LAND FOR DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRY ROOMS.

BY THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY THERE ARE 36 DIFFERENT CANDY FACTORIES IN OR NEAR AREA 4.



IN THE NEXT FEW DECADES THE AREA BECOMES A HOT SPOT FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. HOWEVER, WHILE THIS IS HAPPENING, INDUSTRY STARTS TO PULL OUT OF INNER CITIES.

MEANWHILE PLANS ARE HATCHED FOR A MAJOR ROADWAY IN THE CITY CALLED THE INNER BELT...

Thanks to Million Year Picnic and Tory Row for their support of this illustrated history.

IN 1964 NASA BECOMES INTERESTED IN THE AREA. THE CAMBRIDGE REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY BUYS 47 ACRES IN KENDALL AND AREA 4 AND DEMOLISHES EVERYTHING FOR A BRAVE NEW DEVELOPMENT.



BUT IN 1969 THE RACE TO THE MOON IS OVER AND NIXON IS IN THE OVAL OFFICE. HE PULLS THE PLUG ON NASA.

I SAID, PULL THE PLUG!

...AND THE LAND SITS...



THEY SHOULD BUILD A PARK

BRING BACK THE FACTORIES!

CAMBRIDGE DOES NEED MORE PARKING...

RENTAL HOUSING

AND SITES

LABS, ALL LABS!

...AND SITS UNUSED FOR A DECADE, WHILE DEBATES ON WHAT TO DO WITH IT AROUND.

FINALLY THE CITY COUNCIL CHOOSES TO SUPPORT THE CRAFT PLAN TO BUILD OFFICES AND RESEARCH FACILITIES



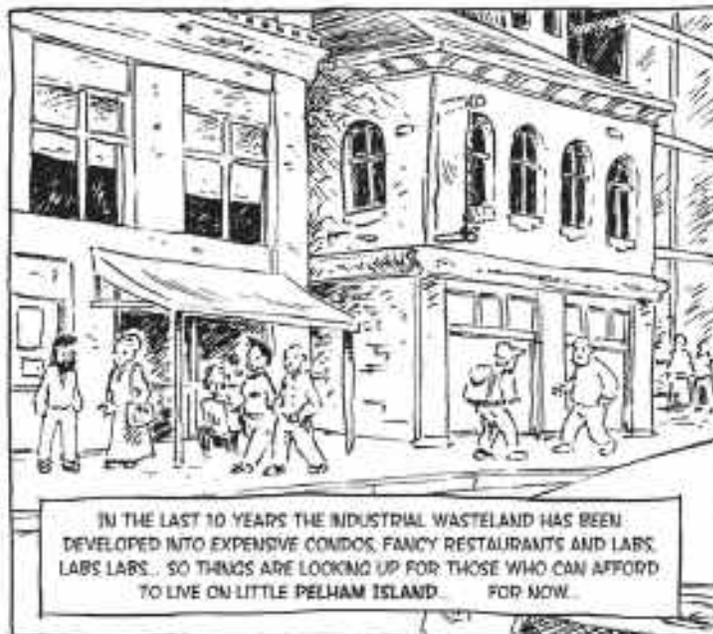
AND A LOT OF NEW COMPANIES START POPPING UP

THE INNER BELT IS TO BE A MASSIVE EIGHT-LANE HIGHWAY AND WILL CUT RIGHT THROUGH THE MIDDLE OF AREA 4 AND CAMBRIDGEPORT. THESE PLANS GO ON FOR DECADES AND STIFLE DEVELOPMENT, WHILE THE DECLINE OF INNER-CITY INDUSTRY BECOMES A FULL-SCALE COLLAPSE.

ALAS THE SCIENTISTS ARE IN AN IVORY TOWER AND THE EMPLOYEES OF THE TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES DON'T LIVE THERE. WITH RENT CONTROL, HOUSING IS CHEAP BUT COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE EXPENSIVE, AND BY THE LATE 70'S DECLINE OF THE HOUSING STOCK AND POVERTY ARE MAJOR ISSUES.



I KNOW BUT DMS IS THE ROOT OF ALL PROBLEMS!



IN THE LAST 10 YEARS THE INDUSTRIAL WASTELAND HAS BEEN DEVELOPED INTO EXPENSIVE CONDOS, FANCY RESTAURANTS AND LABS. LABS LABS... SO THINGS ARE LOOKING UP FOR THOSE WHO CAN AFFORD TO LIVE ON LITTLE PELHAM ISLAND... FOR NOW.

African American Heritage Trail Sites

The Port has long had a strong African American population. Some leaders are commemorated with historical markers.

1. John Fatal aided escaped slaves on the Underground Railroad and was involved in a fight to desegregate the Boston schools from 1844 to 1855. With the failure of that campaign, he moved to Cambridge, where the schools were already integrated.

2. Alberta Scott was the first African American to graduate from Radcliffe College. Raised mainly in Cambridge, she attended the Cambridge Latin School before entering college. In 1900 she was recruited by Booker T. Washington to teach at the Tuskegee Institute, but her life was cut short by illness.

3. Lunsford Lane was born into slavery in Raleigh, North Carolina. An adept businessman, he earned enough money to buy his freedom and set up a successful store before being forced from the South. He later secured the freedom of his wife and children and published his story in *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane*.

4. Clement Morgan was educated in the M Street High School in Washington, D.C., after Emancipation Proclamation. Later, he attended Boston Latin, Harvard College, and Harvard Law. In 1897 he was the first African American elected to the Cambridge Board of Aldermen, and in 1905 he was a founder of the Niagara Movement, the predecessor of the NAACP.



5. William Wells Brown was born into slavery. He escaped, helped numerous others escape, and went on to become one of the first African American novelists, a famous orator, a politician, and a physician.

6. Lewis and J. Milton Clarke were born into slavery in Kentucky but escaped in 1842. Their story is told in *Narrative of the Sufferings of Lewis and Milton Clarke*. Harriet Beecher Stowe based the character George Harris in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on Lewis. In 1870 Milton was elected to the Common Council, the first African American to hold a publicly elected office in Cambridge.

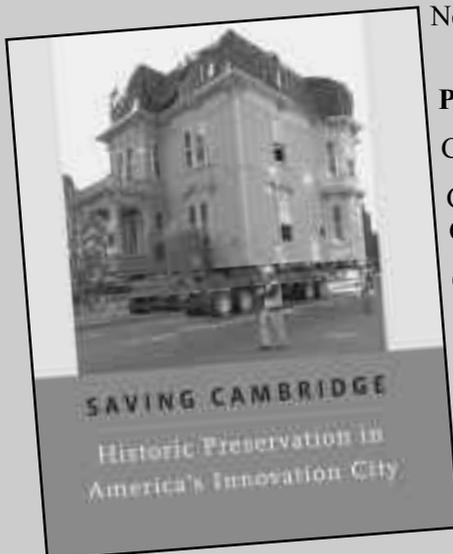
7. Joshua Bowen Smith was born free in Pennsylvania and moved to Boston in 1836. He started his own catering company and employed fugitive slaves. He was a member of the Boston Vigilance Committee and active in aiding escaped slaves. He became a confidant of U.S. Senator Charles Sumner and was elected to the state legislature.

You can read more about these historical figures on their markers throughout the Port or in the guide to the African American Heritage Trail, which is available through the Cambridge Historical Society and the Cambridge African American Heritage Alliance. The CHS serves as the Heritage Trail's fiscal sponsor, provides spaces for programs, and helps with the distribution of publications.

If you would like to learn more about the Heritage Trail, please visit www.cambridgehistory.org/caaha.

Saving History

The Cambridge Historical Society's *Saving Cambridge* was awarded first place in publications by the New England Museum Association. This summer, we also received an award from the Victorian Society's New England Chapter for the book.



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When the Port Was a Port *(continued from page 1)*

The story of the *Henry Endicott* could stand as the story of the Port itself, for when Cambridgeport was designed as a “United States port of delivery” in 1805, it was also a victim of very bad timing. Work began on the Broad Canal in 1806, but just a year later, President Thomas Jefferson declared an embargo on trade with Britain as relations with the mother country soured. Then came war in 1812, and by the time it ended in 1815, the world of maritime commerce had moved on.

But not entirely, as long as the Port was willing to accept its fate as a workaday port for coastal schooners and barges. The Broad Canal remained accessible to masted vessels even after the draw on the Longfellow Bridge, just upstream, was closed in June 1904. However, the three-masted schooner *Sedgewick*, which had delivered its cargo and was riding high as it returned downstream near high tide, got stuck in the Craigie Bridge’s draw in October 1907. Traffic backed up, with teamsters attempting to turn their horses around, adding to the jam. Neither additional tugs nor a Boston & Maine locomotive on a railroad bridge was able to free the schooner. All had to wait until the tide turned.

Newtowne Court *(continued from page 2)*

Because we did not have cars, people came door-to-door to sell linens, dishtowels, Fuller brushes, and big bottles of bleach.

We went to Gordon’s Central Square Theater. I saw Ted Williams there. Because we did not have TV, that was where people would go. I remember seeing *Song of the South*. During the war years we could get into the movies for free if we collected metal for the war effort. We would hear the air raid sirens. My neighbor wore a white air-raid warden’s hat, and she would go door-to-door telling us to turn off the lights in order to protect us from enemy planes bombing the Court. We got a ration book of stamps for buying food. We would go to Paul’s, a sub shop that is still there, on the corner of School and Windsor streets.

People working for Polaroid came across the street dressed in their white coats asking to take pictures. Edwin Land may even have come over to take our pictures when he was working on the [instant] camera. We went to Jimmy’s and the Mahlowitz’s Market. There were many small grocery stores serving the Elms and the Court.

Kids went to Catholic schools and to the Maynard School. We were members of St. Mary’s Parish even after leaving the Court. In the ’60s, when I was a young mother with kids, I fought to stop the Inner Belt, which would have come down Norfolk Street and torn the parish apart. Father Paul McManus helped lead the group that fought it. There is a mural on Magazine Street in Cambridgeport depicting

Before the Longfellow draw was closed, a two-masted schooner ran aground off Magazine Beach in November 1902. According to the *Cambridge Chronicle*, “it was running close to the Cambridge shore and when it struck bottom it struck hard.” Tugs were unable to free it until its cargo of 1,140 tons of coal for the Cambridge Electric Light plant at Western Avenue was offloaded and the schooner was floated and towed away.

The wharves along the Broad Canal continued to be used by lumber and coal firms and companies like the George G. Page Box Company, near present-day Kendall Square. That was “a different kind of use,” as the *Cambridgeport Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge* put it, “from that envisioned by the early port developers, who had in mind international trade rather than the coastwise shipping of wholesale lots of bulky material.”

Bit by bit, even the canal that had once reached, with a dogleg, as far as Miller’s River was shortened and filled in, leaving only today’s stump that serves, in season, as a site for kayak and canoe rentals.

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the people stopping the shovel. The mural means People Power! It is history. People can be successful in fighting big powers.

Over time the population in the Court changed. There were more single-parent families, more mothers raising kids alone. Growing up, I knew one person on welfare. In later years, there were terrible and unfair stereotypical images of the development. This was not the case when I was growing up. It is not fair to those who live there now.

My philosophy is that public housing should be on every street. There should be no segregation. Subsidized housing should be mixed with all other housing. The goal should be to have low-income housing on every street of every city. We should live with people of all incomes and blend in as neighbors, not be segregated as low-income people living in this special place.

I have four children and five grandchildren and one on the way. My two daughters want to live in Cambridge, but it is too expensive. One daughter now lives with us but wants her own household. The loss of rent control has been devastating to the city. We are the fourth generation on my street. It is a sad indictment when we make the city attractive for those with money while so many others cannot afford to live. I would hate to have to leave Cambridge, especially as I get older.

This story first appeared in a January 2004 issue of 4word.

What's in a Name By Bruce Irving

If names were medals, the neighborhood variously called the Port, Area 4, and Cambridgeport North would be well decorated.

That's a testament to its long history, one that goes back to the 1793 opening of the West Boston Bridge, connecting Cambridge to Boston and kicking off a building boom along Main Street and the filling in of many acres of tidal marsh. The "port" in Cambridgeport was the port of delivery to the United States that developed at the foot of the bridge, near today's Kendall Square.

When Cambridge became a city in 1846, it was divided into three wards: Old Cambridge, Cambridgeport, and East Cambridge. Cambridgeport encompassed the whole of Cambridge east of Lee Street, except East Cambridge. The area south of Central Square developed particularly quickly and was popularly called Cambridgeport, while the complex of canals and wharves and the residential community around Kendall Square was the Lower Port. That left the neighborhood northeast of the Square, which became known as "the Port."

All was well and good until the Cambridge Planning Board, in preparation for the 1950 census, divided the city into 13 neighborhoods, then made it official with the publication in 1953 of *Thirteen Neighborhoods: One City*. Citing political wards, school districts, parishes, and a variety of geographic and social divisions, the paper

declared, "In only a few instances do the boundaries of these areas coincide." In its wisdom, the board stated, "[None] of the present divisions of Cambridge residential areas has been found suitable to serve city planning purposes." Instead, it cited a new concept, "the neighborhood unit principle," which wore its social engineering on its sleeve: "In the neighborhood groupings no attempt has been made to draw neighborhood boundaries so that they include homogeneous social, economic, or ethnic groups. Democratic participation in civic life can best begin at the neighborhood level."

As Charles Sullivan, executive director of the Cambridge Historical Commission, says, "The planning areas were statistical constructs that had little or nothing to do with how residents defined their own neighborhoods. Given the rapid turnover of the population, these designations caused loss of neighborhood identity and mass confusion." To complicate matters further, the *Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge*, published in 1971, called the same basic area Cambridgeport North.

Happily, tradition continues to trump city planning schemes and even architectural surveys, so while today's denizens of the neighborhood north of Cambridgeport are fine with handing out guest parking permits marked with a big 4, they still tell their out-of-town friends to come down to the Port for a visit.

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