Mapping Cambridge: From Wigwams to Aerials
By Michael Kenney

A recognizably mapped Cambridge first appears in the early 1630s. About where you would expect to find the future Harvard Square, there is a largish meetinghouse with some small houses grouped around it. And most notably there are, not too far off, several groups of conical structures, labeled “Indians.”

But that map, however sketchy and suggestive, was the first step in the process of mapping Cambridge that continues to the present day, now with the technological aid of aerial photographs and global positioning systems.

For Cantabrigians interested in their city’s history, a number of historical maps can now be accessed on the website of the city’s Geographic Information System (GIS) with the Cambridge City Viewer (see page 7). Other online resources for historic maps of Cambridge include the Boston Public Library (http://maps.bpl.org) and the Harvard Map Collection (http://hcl.harvard.edu).

Of prime interest on the GIS site is the 1865 map created by the civil engineer J. G. Chase. It shows the city before extensive land-making filled the marshes in East Cambridge and Cambridgeport and when much of North Cambridge was still farmland.

(continued on page 6)
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The Newetowne Chronicle is published three times annually by the Cambridge Historical Society.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

A Major Achievement

The Society will be celebrating the publication of A City’s Life and Times: Cambridge in the Twentieth Century ($20) with a party on November 7 at the Harvard Bookstore. The 400-page book—illustrated with maps, photographs, and drawings—is our first especially commissioned volume. I think you will want to add this important contribution to the documentation of Cambridge history to your library.

Since its founding in 1905, the Society has published lectures on Cambridge history in its Proceedings as well as a number of booklets on Cambridge topics. But this book goes well beyond the scope of previous efforts in its wide range of 20th-century topics. It is a significant contribution to the Society’s mission of preserving and presenting Cambridge history.


A number of individuals are responsible for this book. First and foremost, Daphne Abeel deserves our gratitude for the attention she gave to this major project over the past four years. Karen Davis and Lewis Bushnell contributed many hours beyond their usual duties to the production process. And many thanks are due the writers who graciously contributed their articles.

Finally, the Society extends its sincere appreciation to Cambridge Savings Bank, whose financial support has made this effort possible.

See page 10 for details on the publication party. Do plan to attend and be among the first to purchase a copy.

Ted Hansen

A Request from the President

Each year in late fall the Society calls on its members and friends to produce the income needed to avoid dipping into our modest endowment. I ask that when you receive the annual appeal letter, you will consider making a generous contribution.

Our 2007 Spring Benefit was a financial success and membership revenues are stable, but we need to raise $50,000 to match the Community Preservation Grant we received to renew the electrical system at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House.

Thank you for your past donations to the Cambridge Historical Society. They have permitted the Society to be the success it is in collecting, preserving, and presenting Cambridge history.
FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Oldest House…

The Fairbanks House in Dedham and the Balch House in Beverly have each claimed to be the oldest house in Massachusetts. The Cooper-Frost-Austin (CFA) House and the Society’s Hooper-Lee-Nichols (HLN) House have vied for the title of oldest in Cambridge.

A 1930 marker at Linnaean Street and Massachusetts Avenue claims that the CFA House was built in 1657 and is the city’s oldest. At about the same time, a plaque on the fence of the HLN House announced that the “Nichols House” was built ca. 1660. Subsequently, the date of the HLN House was revised to ca. 1685 and that of the CFA House revised to ca. 1690. Recently, the CFA House was redated to 1681. What’s with the date creep?

Local historians relying on documentary research usually established the inaccurate early dates. The 1660 date of the HLN House, for example, was probably based on deeds traced back to Robert Holmes. Even when deeds mention a house, they do not specify where on farm-sized lots the house was located, nor do they record the replacement of one house by another. Accurate dating of 17th-century houses must include an analysis of physical evidence. In 1979, Abbott Lowell Cummings, who had been studying the subject for decades, published his groundbreaking book, The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625-1725, which defined the physical characteris-
tics of what are now called First Period houses. In 1980, Anne Grady and Sally Zimmerman studied the HLN House under Cummings’s supervision and revised its date to ca. 1685. Since then dating First Period houses has become a subspecialty of historic preservation.

A new technique called dendrochronology—the DNA of physical evidence—has made it possible to date First Period houses precisely. Wood samples of the oldest timbers in the house are compared to a master chronology of the tree-ring pattern for a given species of tree from the same region. This was recently done at the CFA House to establish the date of its initial construction as 1681. Dendrochronology also settled the question of Fairbanks (1641) vs. Balch (1677).

There are about twenty “dendro-dated” 17th-century houses in the Boston area. Perhaps the most famous one is the House of Seven Gables in Salem (1668), which was restored to its First Period appearance by Joseph Everett Chandler in 1909. He also restored the CFA House and added the library to the HLN House. Now called the Chandler Room, it is a Colonial Revival interpretation of a First Period room.

Both the HLN House and the CFA House began as “half houses,” growing over the centuries to their present sizes. Chandler restored the CFA House to highlight its First Period details, but the HLN House is maintained as an example of the Georgian style, which it became when it was remodeled in the 1730s, hiding its then unfashionable First Period features.

What really matters, of course, is not which house is “the oldest” but that these precious antiques exist at all. This is largely because most First Period houses are owned by preservation organizations or historical societies devoted to ensuring their survival and keeping them open to the public. The Cambridge Historical Society is proud to be the steward of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, and is grateful to its members and the community for the financial support that makes it possible.

Karen L. Davis
RECENT PROGRAMS

Cambridge Cameos

In June, the British historian Roger Thompson spoke to us about his book *Cambridge Cameos: Stories of Life in Seventeenth-Century New England*. Using unpublished documents, Thompson reconstructed personal stories, including an unflattering one about Dr. Richard Hooper, who settled here in 1685 after working as a ship’s surgeon and built the earliest part of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. That year Hooper sold a horse to 18-year-old Samuel Rolfe. Rolfe’s mother “took one look at the horse, and ordered it to be returned.” Refusing, Hooper sued Rolfe for payment. A jury decided that Hooper had taken advantage of Rolfe’s inexperience and overcharged him.

The program was cosponsored by the Cambridge Historical Commission. To order *Cambridge Cameos*, visit sales@pictonpress.com.

Cambridge Discovery Days

Almost 400 people participated in the Historic Cambridge Collaborative’s Cambridge Discovery Days in August. To celebrate the bicentennial of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s birth, tours, walks, and activities all over the city featured literary themes. The CHS offered a walking tour called “It’s a Classic: American Architecture and Famous Phrases,” and we opened “Cambridge Literati: Writers in Residence” at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. The exhibition brings together photographs of over 20 historically significant Cambridge writers, their houses, and excerpts from their works. In addition, we culled our collections for items with literary associations, including a model of the first printing press in the colonies and Robert Frost’s tuxedo. The exhibition will be remounted for the annual meeting (see page 10).

The Sparks House with the Reverend Peter Gomes

“I am a material man trapped in a spiritual body,” joked the Reverend Professor Peter Gomes, minister at Harvard’s Memorial Church, as he described his passion for collecting the “affordable” antiques, paintings, and furnishings that fill his gracious home, the 1838 Treadwell-Sparks House on Kirkland Street. He is particularly proud of two portraits he was instrumental in acquiring for Harvard and returning to the house. Gomes described the pictures of Jared and Mary Crowninshield Silsbee Sparks as a “wedding pair,” noting that they must have hung on these very walls when Sparks and his wife owned the house.

Jared Sparks was an American historian and Harvard’s 17th president (1849–1853). Gomes described him as the “David McCullough of his day,” for his volumes on George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and others were widely read.

The Society is most grateful to Professor Gomes for his invitation and his hospitality.
Hunt for History:  
A Tory Row Quest  
Ongoing  

Are you looking for a free, fun activity for your family this fall? The Cambridge Historical Society can send you on a hunt for history. The Tory Row Quest is a self-guided historical and architectural treasure hunt focusing on Cambridge before and during the American Revolution. Rhyming clues lead to points of interest along Brattle Street while telling the story of the people who once lived here. The last clue reveals a “treasure box” and a visitor log, where you can write comments or perhaps an inspired poem, like this one by Jessica, Joshua, and Isaac Colman:

We walked the blocks to find the treasure  
We had lots of fun it was a pleasure  
Thanks for all the interesting facts for to the 1700s we journeyed back.

Pick up your quest map during open hours at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, the Longfellow National Historic Site, and the information kiosk in Harvard Square, or call the Society, and we will send one to you. Seek, and history ye shall find!

The Tory Row Quest was funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati.

Our gratitude goes to:

Fourteen students who came to the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House on August 31 as part of MIT’s 16th Annual City Days Program. They helped organize the Society’s publications, dismantled a wooden framework in the garage, removed unwanted garden bricks, and pulled out a pesky vine that had invaded our hedge.

Rebekah Kaufman and Jason Amunwa, for volunteering their marketing and graphic (respectively) skills to help the CHS promote A City’s Life and Times: Cambridge in the Twentieth Century.

The Cambridge Plant and Garden Club, for creating and maintaining the beautiful gardens at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House.

Michael Hanlon, for donating his time to major yard cleanups.

Michael Marchesi, for servicing our snow blower for the last four years.
Mapping Cambridge
(continued from page 1)

Other maps of historical interest on the GIS website show properties on the National Register of Historic Places, landmarks, and historical markers. Coming in the months ahead is the Walling map of 1854, decorated around the perimeter with engravings of major public buildings—most of them now long gone.

As Charles M. Sullivan, executive director of the Cambridge Historical Commission, explained, that map-making impulse has been driven, over the years, by a variety of reasons—from a basic need just to know where we were to later needs to define property ownership, then to develop open land beyond the early town center, and then to insure what had been developed.

The four maps illustrated here—the 1854 Walling map, the 1865 Chase map, the 1877 Franklin bird’s eye map, and a map from the 1916 G. W. Bromley Atlas—all show sections of the Dana Hill neighborhood as it evolved.

Dana Hill was being developed by the early 1840s; several of its Greek Revival houses are still standing. Notable on the Chase map are the neighborhood school on Centre Street, the Unitarian meetinghouse on Lee Street, and the Hovey Nursery, which was favorably compared by an English visitor to England’s private gardens—all long gone. The neo-Elizabethan Burton Halls apartment building, known as “The Castle,” was just seven years old when the 1916 Bromley atlas was published.

In addition to property, major events that involved Cambridge were illustrated on maps of the surrounding region. One, shows the location of the Revolutionary War fortifications erected during the Siege of Boston—such as Fort Washington. It even shows the lines of fire covering the Charles River approaches to Cambridge. Several 19th-century maps trace the route of the Middlesex Canal past East Cambridge to Lowell.

And even the most utilitarian maps had intriguing stories behind them, Sullivan noted in a lecture at the Harvard Map Collection.

There’s the 1759 map, which shows the city’s annexation of the area west of Sparks Street from Watertown. Landowners had petitioned to join Cambridge because it had become too far to travel to the Watertown meetinghouse.

“But as soon as they got that Cambridge Zip Code,” quipped Sullivan, “they cashed out and sold their properties to the Brattle Street Tories.”

The amateur mapmaker Peter Tufts, who recorded early-19th-century development schemes, made sure to get his own property on his maps. His 1824 map of a plan for the Cambridgeport parish shows his land along Magazine Street near the present Tufts Street—complete with its duck yard, its poultry yard, and its dung yard.

Then there’s the shortest-distance-between-two-points (but not always the best route) map of 1810. It shows the present Harvard Street running straight from Harvard Square toward the West Boston Bridge (now Longfellow Bridge), eliminating the jog through Central Square.

There were two problems, however. First, the street cut through the Dana estate—which Francis Dana tried to block by building an “Opposition House” on the right-of-way. He lost in court and had to move the house, which...
still stands at 2-4 Hancock Place. That straight-line route also involved climbing over Dana Hill, which is why Massachusetts Avenue–Main Street remains the favored route through the city; even bicyclists try to avoid going west up Dana Hill.

With the development of high-speed four-color printing in the mid-19th century, even those maps designed for property and insurance purposes became handsome enough to display in bank and law offices. Especially notable were the Sanborn atlases.

As Vincent Virga writes in his new book, Cartographia: Mapping Civilizations, when the insurance business expanded nationwide in the mid-1800s, underwriters could no longer “examine properties they were about to insure,” so they needed maps.

D. A. Sanborn, a young surveyor from Somerville, began producing maps in 1866, and his Sanborn Map Company eventually monopolized the field. On these maps, “the outline, or footprint, of each building was indicated and color coded to show its construction material.” The numbers of stories in the building and other information needed to insure the structure were also recorded.

The Bromley atlases from the same period were, in essence, illustrated city directories identifying the property owners by printing their names over the outline of their building or across their lot.

In later years, the Sanborn atlases were printed in black-and-white but still provided the details that, Virga writes, made them “an inventory of the nation’s cultural environment.”

Contemporary maps of Cambridge, based on aerial photography, lack the fine detail of the early atlases, but they have the advantage of being updated more frequently than was possible when it took teams of researchers to walk the streets. And it should be noted that maps, both old and new, can be put to more pleasant uses than calculating insurance premiums.

Just this past summer, the Historical Society used a city map to guide children on its “Hunt for History: A Tory Row Quest.” And last spring, Gerry Swislow of Cambridgeport superimposed on the 1854 Walling map the route for the Bicycle Commission’s “Rolling Through Cambridge Geography” bike tour, tracing how “the geography underlying this land shaped the development of Cambridge.”

Going Mapping: A Primer

Going mapping online with the Cambridge CityViewer requires just a bit of exploring on the city’s Geographic Information System (GIS) website.

For a browser, you’ll need either Internet Explorer or Firefox. (Safari won’t work, at least for now.)

Go to the city’s website, www.cambridgema.gov, and click on Departments at the top center of the page. Click on Geographic Information System (GIS).

On the GIS home page, there’s a list of links on the right. Click on Historical Viewer, then click on the links in the first paragraph to bring up instructions on using the search engine—and off you go.

What you’ll get is the Cambridge CityViewer. Available now is the 1865 Chase map (see front page) and a 2003 aerial view. The “Historical Areas” tab provides maps of historical markers, historic districts, and similar items.

The site also has links to current city maps and aerial photos from Live Local. According to both Jeff Amero, GIS manager, and GIS specialist Y. Vanessa Puchi, additional information and research layers can be added to the site if users would find them helpful, so feedback is welcome.
**On the Road**

On Saturday, June 23, the D. Gilbert Dexter (aka Baker) House was spotted heading up Massachusetts Avenue. Owned by Harvard, the Dexter House, along with the Alden Keene (aka Ukranian) House and a carriage barn, were moved two blocks, to the corner of Mel- len Street, to make way for a new Harvard Law School building. According to the Cambridge Historical Commission, the two handsome houses, built in 1876 and 1875, are among only nine remaining out of the 69 mansions that lined Massachusetts Avenue north of the Com- mon in the late 19th century, when it was a prestigious address called North Avenue.

Keene and Dexter—the original owners of the houses—were both physicians. In the 1920s, another physician, Dr. David C. Dow, the Middlesex County medical examiner, purchased the Dexter House and had his office there. His son, Dr. David C. Dow II (1903-1999), whom many readers will remember, followed his fa- ther as medical examiner, and also lived and kept an office in the house. In 1967 Dr. Dow diagnosed the first case of bubonic plague in Middlesex County. Harvard acquired the Keene House in the 1950s and the Dexter House in the 1970s.

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**Cambridge Historical Society Honored at MIT**

We were among the five organizations “working to preserve and bring vitality to our community’s heritage” recognized by MIT and the City at the 15th Annual Cambridge First Day luncheon on June 12. Each organization received a $1,000 donation from MIT, a framed award, a bound City Council resolution, and other accolades.

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**Thinking of CHS**

Recently, several members have asked for our tax identification number because they are preparing wills and want to leave a bequest to the Cam- bridge Historical Society. We thank them for con- sidering the CHS in their estate planning.

For the convenience of those who are considering a tax deductible contribution, our tax ID number is 046-032-737.
FROM THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Mark Time
By Mark Vassar

The Cambridge Historical Society currently has 30 of its archival collections cataloged in NUCMC—the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections. Operated by the Library of Congress, it is an online database that is free to researchers and repositories.

Most academic and professional libraries and archives belong to a cataloging service called OCLC (Online Computer Library Center). Descriptions of archival collections that appear in OCLC also appear in NUCMC. Because small repositories, such as CHS, generally cannot afford to subscribe to OCLC, the Library of Congress offers them the opportunity to fill out a form describing a particular collection or a completed finding aid. (See sidebar.) The catalog record is then posted in the NUCMC database, which contains brief descriptions of nearly 300,000 manuscript collections throughout the country.

You can search NUCMC by title, subject, and a variety of other categories.

To begin, visit http://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc. Click on “Search the OCLC Catalog”; then click on “Simple Search Form (word list)—titles, notes, and subject field.” Type in your search terms, for example: “Cambridge Massachusetts Photographers.” A list of records should be generated.

Click on “More on this record” to view details of individual collections.

Excerpt from one of the Society’s Archival Collections on NUCMC

Author: Bull, Sara Chapman Thorp
Title: Papers, 1830-1910 (bulk 1880-1910).
Description: 6 boxes.

Sara Chapman Thorp was born in 1850 in upstate New York. The family moved to Madison, WI, and became prominent. The Norwegian violinist Ole Bull courted Sara against her father’s wishes, but her mother supported the marriage and in 1870 took her to Europe, where she and Ole were secretly married.

In 1879 Sara moved to Cambridge with her daughter and mother, but was with her husband in Norway when he died in 1880. After his death, Sara wrote Ole Bull: A Memoir (1883).

She continued to live in Cambridge, becoming a close friend of such people as Celia Thaxter, Julia Ward Howe, and Sarah Orne Jewett.

She also initiated and sponsored the “Cambridge Conferences” (1897–1899), which brought together intellectual and cultural leaders for lectures on philosophical, social, and religious topics. In her later years, she became interested in Eastern religions, financially supported their efforts, and eventually joined an Indian sect. She died in 1911.

The bulk of the collection consists of correspondence Sara Bull received during her time in Cambridge (1880-1910).

There are also letters to Ole or Sara Bull, or to some third party concerning them, dating from as early as the 1830s. These letters comprise the general correspondence series.

Letters and articles related to the Cambridge Conferences are in a second series.

The third series consists of photographs and framed poems.
Calendar of Events

Members will be mailed invitations to the following programs. Nonmembers are welcome when space is available, and they are encouraged to join the Cambridge Historical Society.

Wednesday, November 7
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Publication Party at the Harvard Bookstore
Please come to celebrate the release of the Society’s new book, A City’s Life and Times: Cambridge in the Twentieth Century. Daphne Abeel will whet your appetite for this lively collection of articles on the city’s politics, its distinctive institutions, its immigrant community, churches, architecture, cultural life, neighborhoods, and so much more. After her remarks, she will sign books, and we will raise a glass to toast this splendid occasion.

Publication supported by a grant from Cambridge Savings Bank

Wednesday, December 12
Time: 5:00–7:00 p.m.
Holiday Open House
Enjoy the festive atmosphere, food provided by friends and local caterers, and seasonal music. Guests will have an opportunity to purchase A City’s Life and Times: Cambridge in the Twentieth Century, as well as CHS gift memberships.

Sunday, January 27
Time: 2:00–4:00 p.m.
Annual Meeting
Following a short business meeting, Warren M. “Renny” Little, our executive director emeritus, who lives in the former home of Robert Frost, will share some little-known details about the poet’s life in Cambridge, and Lewis Bushnell will give a “gallery talk” about our exhibition “Cambridge Literati: Writers in Residence” (see page 4).

Wednesday, February 27
Time: 6:00–8:00 p.m.
Film Screening: John Harvard
Michael Van Devere, who wrote, produced, and directed a fictional account of Harvard University’s first great benefactor and eternal namesake, will discuss the project and show the 45-minute film. The Chandler Room at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House stood in for John Harvard’s home in the year 1638, where he utters his last words. $5 for members; $10 for non-members. Seating is limited. RSVP by calling 617-547-4252 or e-mailing sally@cambridgehistory.org.

SAVE THE DATE

Sunday afternoon, May 18
Spring Benefit
Place: Morss Hall, MIT
The grand ballroom of the 1916 Walker Memorial Building at MIT is the perfect place to celebrate 20th-century Cambridge—the theme of our major fundraising event in 2008.

ONGOING

A Tory Row Quest
(see page 5 for details)

Tours of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House
Tuesday and Thursday at 2:00 and 3:00 p.m.
$5; free for CHS members. Call to arrange a group tour.

Event details will be posted on our website as they become available. Unless otherwise noted, events will take place at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House.

Correction
Thank you to Cornelia Zinsser for alerting us that our writeup on the Ruggles-Fayerweather House (Summer 2007) gave the incorrect first name for one of the owners. The correct name is Roger Bigelow Merriman. He was the father of our member Helen Merriman Fernald, who grew up in the house.
New members, 9/1/06–8/31/07

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<td>Roderick MacFarquhar and Dalena Wright</td>
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Special thanks to Tod Beaty and the brokers at Hammond Real Estate for giving gift memberships to new homeowners.

Active members make history come alive.

Become a member or sign up a friend and make the past a thing of the present!

__Yes, I/we want to become a member of the Cambridge Historical Society at the following level:

- $35 Single
- $60 Family
- $100 Dana Fellow (Single)*

- $150 Dana Fellow (Dual)*
- $250 Sponsor*
- $500 Patron*

- $1,000 Benefactor*

*Richard Henry Dana Fellows receive invitations to special events throughout the year which often include visits to private sites of architectural or historical significance.

__Please send a gift membership in my name to the following person/people:

Name(s)__________________________________________

Street Address____________________________________

City, State, Zip____________________________________

Telephone, E-mail__________________________________

Please mail your check, payable to The Cambridge Historical Society, to: 159 Brattle Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.
The Mission of the Cambridge Historical Society

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

This detail of the Dana Hill neighborhood is taken from the 1877 bird’s eye map published by the Franklin View Co. (See cover story.)